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VOLUME 60 ISSUE 1

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

My first viewing of *The Wizard of Oz* took place in a tiny condominium nestled in North Arlington, NJ— the year was 2009, and I had just moved to the States from India. I remember the discomfort of watching the black-and-white Kansas farmlands and Miss Gulch, the petty, wealthy landowner. But when Dorothy landed in Oz, surrounded by Munchkins and, miraculously, in possession of red ruby slippers, I reveled in the magic of it all. Oh, to traverse the yellow brick road with a band of quirky, endearing friends! Fetus Sahana saw the utopia of Technicolor.

Now, I see the layers beneath the surface: "Things are not always what they seem." Remember when Dorothy and the gang are rendered unconscious by a field of poisonous poppies? Yeah, it's an allegory for the opium epidemic that gripped the 1930s. Dorothy, it seems, may have been a touch delulu. And let us not forget *Wicked's* portrayal of Elphaba— her heart-wrenching backstory filled with cruelty. Moreover, the achievements of the technicolor film industry, while revolutionary for its time, weren't without their cost. The dreamlike fantasy of Hollywood came with an expensive price tag. Yet, it is difficult (and possibly unethical) to reduce things to a simple label of "good" or "bad".

Here's a secret: We don't have to. We can embrace the complexities, occupy the gray areas, and rest assured knowing that nuanced stances are valid.

In this issue, you will find an honest exploration of art, culture, and color. We delve into stories that shape our cultural narratives, from BookTok to Justin Bieber to Beli, a Goodreads-like app for restaurant ratings. We fill the pages with every shade of hue. Whether it's the art of storytelling, the evolution of pop culture, or the joy of discovering new perspectives, there's something here for everyone.

Readers, we hope you find our palette delightfully colorful.

-Sahana Iyer

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CULTURE

Photo by Amber Safeer

Classics to Clickbait: How BookTok is Redefining Literature

By Hermeline Berteloot

100 comments



1982



therutgersreview

If you consider yourself a reader and own a phone, chances are you've come across "BookTok." Whether you're a fan or not is another story. For those unfamiliar with this side of TikTok, BookTok is one of the many corners of the platform dominated by readers who share book-related recommendations and reviews. This phenomenon has made reading trendy again, significantly influencing book sales.

However, this resurgence of reading on the app has also sparked debates around certain books, tropes, and genres. One ongoing debate that resurfaced in August 2024 is whether BookTok promotes anti-intellectualism and destroys literature.

TikToker @Bookishwithb, or Celine, the content creator who led the resurfacing of this debate, voiced her frustration over what she perceives as the "rise of anti-intellectualism" in promoting books on TikTok to boost marketability. Celine and many others explain that reducing books to formulaic tropes strips them of their literary depth, encouraging "shallow" reading habits and prioritizing entertainment over meaningful, thought-provoking content. They believe this trend favors easily digestible, cookie-cutter narratives at the expense of more complex, nuanced works.

12-6 Reply

Reply to therutgersreview's comment



*Now, I believe this has some truth to it. I'm an English major after all, I value complex and thought-provoking literature. Most of the content I consume on TikTok is from BookTok, and I do get tired of the same books being recommended over and over again (Fourth Wing, Binding 13, Magnolia Parks, etc.) In her original video, Celine talks about two videos she saw on her "for you page" regarding R.F. Kuang's *The Poppy War*. One talked about the book in depth, explaining the complexities of the world and characters, while the other recommended the book simply because it has a "strong female character." She acknowledges that both are true, but she argues that reducing the trilogy to one aspect of one character diminishes the author's work.*

I can understand her frustration. However, I think it is important to remember the nature of TikTok. It is a platform that rewards quick-to-consume content, and those trying to reach as many people as possible NEED to play into this in order to "go viral." I'm not saying that this is right; however, I am suggesting that TikTok as a whole is promoting anti-intellectualism, not content creators who just want to find a community of readers.

Reply to therutgersreview's comment



There is also concern that the publishing industry is being "destroyed" as publishers increasingly prioritize books with popular "TikTok buzzwords," shaping their choices based on what goes viral on the app. Sure, there's some truth to that; TikTok has reshaped the market. But, as someone who probably spends more money in bookstores than I can afford, I testify that there's still much variety out there. If you're after a certain kind of literature—the kind you consider "good"—you'll find plenty of options that don't fit into the TikTok mold. BookTok may be flooded with the same few titles, but bookstores aren't.

Throughout the past year, many of those who joined the BookTok community as established book lovers rather than new readers influenced by the platform have also criticized the quality of the recommended books. They argue that many are "written with little to no care," with authors driven solely by the desire to sell rather than to offer a genuine literary experience.

Honestly, I hate this argument. Sure, there are cases where books have been rushed to publication, leading to a dip in quality, cough cough... Iron Flame... But I don't think that reflects an author's overall ability. More often, it's the result of pressure from publishers to churn out new releases quickly.

Reply to therutgersreview's comment



To group all TikTok-trending authors into the same category feels unfair. Critiquing an author's entire body of work on a few books—or worse, acting like these judgments are facts—is over the top. I'm all for sharing opinions on books, but that's precisely what they are: opinions, not universal truths.

*What's more, people on the app have gone so far as to attack the intelligence and character of those who enjoy popular BookTok books. When you put it like that, most of us can agree it's wrong. But in a 30-second video of someone holding up *Twisted Love* and screaming about how poorly written it is and/or how ridiculous the plot twists (no pun intended) are, it's easy to get swept up in the negativity without questioning how problematic this is.*

Reply to therutgersreview's comment



Why can't people just enjoy what they enjoy? Not every book needs to be life-changing, that's the beauty of literature—it's personal. We're not all going to love the same books, and that's okay. What's important is finding what resonates with you, whether it's escaping into a fictional world or reflecting on your own. Even more importantly, it's gotten people to read who might not have picked up a book in years.

Publisher and BookToker @lilycantstopreading and many others have expressed appreciation for how BookTok makes reading more accessible to a wider audience. As lovers of literature, isn't that more important than judging the complexity of what people choose to read?

In the United States, "54% of adults have a literacy below sixth-grade level," states a 2024 report from the National Literacy Institute and, according to a 2021 Pew Research survey, roughly a quarter of American adults say they haven't read a book in whole or in part in the past year. *Isn't that alarming? Knowing this, shouldn't we praise any form of engagement with literature, no matter how complex or simple? I'm not saying books shouldn't be critiqued— they should, they promote conversation. I'm saying that people who enjoy these books shouldn't be criticized for their tastes. People who feel ashamed for liking certain books are less likely to engage with literature. BookTok books—often romance and fantasy—serve as gateways to broader, and sometimes more complex, genres or formats. For many, myself included, these popular titles are an entry point into a lifelong reading habit.*

Additionally, it is important to realize the importance of reading for pleasure. Author and BookToker Nicole McKeon @nicoleyorkcreates explains that if a book isn't entertaining, people won't keep reading. She notes that in these engaging stories, authors "sneak in exposure to people who think and feel differently, the ability to empathize, and critique society." She argues that dismissing BookTok as anti-intellectual is a "huge mistake" and "unfair," as it implies that reading is only valid if it's dense, which discourages people from exploring literature.

Amidst all the criticism, BookTok has fundamentally reshaped how many people perceive literature. It's made reading not only more accessible but also more fun, turning it into a hobby that anyone can enjoy, regardless of their preferences or background. BookTok has created a community where readers connect over their love—or their hate—for certain books, no matter the genre or complexity. In a country where so many struggle with literacy, the fact that TikTok has reignited such a passion for reading is something we should be celebrating.

Instead of shaming people for their reading tastes, how about we focus on diversifying recommendations. *I really am tired of hearing about the same ten books.* What really matters is that people are reading. Rather than gatekeeping what counts as "good" literature, let's continue to expand the conversation and celebrate the diversity of stories that can bring people back to reading.

BRAIN ROT!



by amber safeer **AND GIGACHAD!**

***I am so sorry in advance
(lowkey in my apology era??)***

The study of languages, better known as linguistics, is such a marvelous concept (**LINGUISTICS MENTIONED... WTF IS MORPHOLOGY (!!?)**). Language is constantly evolving right before our very eyes, in ways that we may not even realize until the changes are forever cemented into our grammar and vocabulary. Maybe you have even seen the deep dives of content creators like Adam Aleksic (@etymologynerd on Instagram) into things like the way people text, how anapodota (**erm what the sigma**) work, and so much more. Language is all around us in the most curious of ways (**chat is this based??**).

And then, there's *brain rot*. A term used to describe totally mindless, moronic (**goofy ahh**) content on social media. More specifically, there is brain rot *slang*, and if you have ever opened Instagram or TikTok before, then you know exactly what I'm talking about.

W Rizz. Gyatt. Mewing. Looksmaxxing. Delulu. Serving. Alpha Male.

What started out as ironic phrases to mock the chronically online has since crept its way into our everyday conversations (**let's normalize saying skibidi**). Some, like "delulu," are just words that were clipped from a pre-existing word (delusional), with some added linguistic processes (diminutive reduplication and semantic widening) to give it the cutesy effect it has now. Others, such as "gooning," are just... a mystery to me (**red flag**).

But it's all just harmless fun, right? Well, these slang words may be (no matter how much some of them infuriate me). However, this overarching idea of "brain rot" may be something of more concern (**okay serving intellectual**). In a 2021 analysis conducted for the Information and Management journal, researchers discovered that excessive social media use can lead to attentional deficits and increased distraction in daily life (Xie, Rost, Wang, Wang, Monk). In another study led by the University of Turku, researchers also found that problematic social media use can lead to an increase in loneliness (**just mewmaxx & become the alpha rizzler**), which in turn negatively affects life satisfaction over time (Marttila, Koivula, Räsänen) (**i fear she's a yapper**).

However, it is important to note that brain rot and excessive social media use are not the same thing. Yes, this idea of “brain rot” stems from the online sphere, but just because you are using brain rot terms or watching brain rot content does not always mean that you are also using social media too much (*girl says brainrot as much as bro says parkour civilization*).

In fact, this idea of “brain rot” is nothing new. It is actually a very common way to widen the generational divide—a way to claim that one generation is superior and smarter than another (*trauma dump much?*). In this case, it’s Gen Z saying that Gen Alpha is slowly growing dumber with unrestricted access to social media and the internet. When we were younger, though, we experienced the same thing: our Gen X parents arguing that all that TV would rot our Millennial and Gen Z brains. And before them, older generations would contend that even excessive reading could make our minds deteriorate (*blud is so red-pilled*).

So, like so many things, brain rot is nothing but a social construct. However, how we choose to feel about it can greatly impact the future generations to come (*it’s giving demure*). This modern-day definition of brain rot and the words associated with it are not intended to be an inherently negative thing. In fact, the point of brain rot is to simply be a reflection of your interests and the communities you fit into (*erm, akshually 🤔👁️*). They’re just like any other slang terms you’ve heard of, save for the fact that they originated online. They bring communities together, allow us to have a break from the madness of formalities in school and work, and most importantly, they’re FUN (*slay the house down boots*)!

All of that to say, do not be ashamed of knowing or using your brain rot terms or referencing niche content. Embrace it. You may just find someone who understands your humor and lingo along the way.

(*period, no tampon*)





Photo by Akansha Singh



Photo by Akansha Singh



Photo by Ally Garcia

THE JUSTIN BIEBER & P-DIDDY SITUATION:

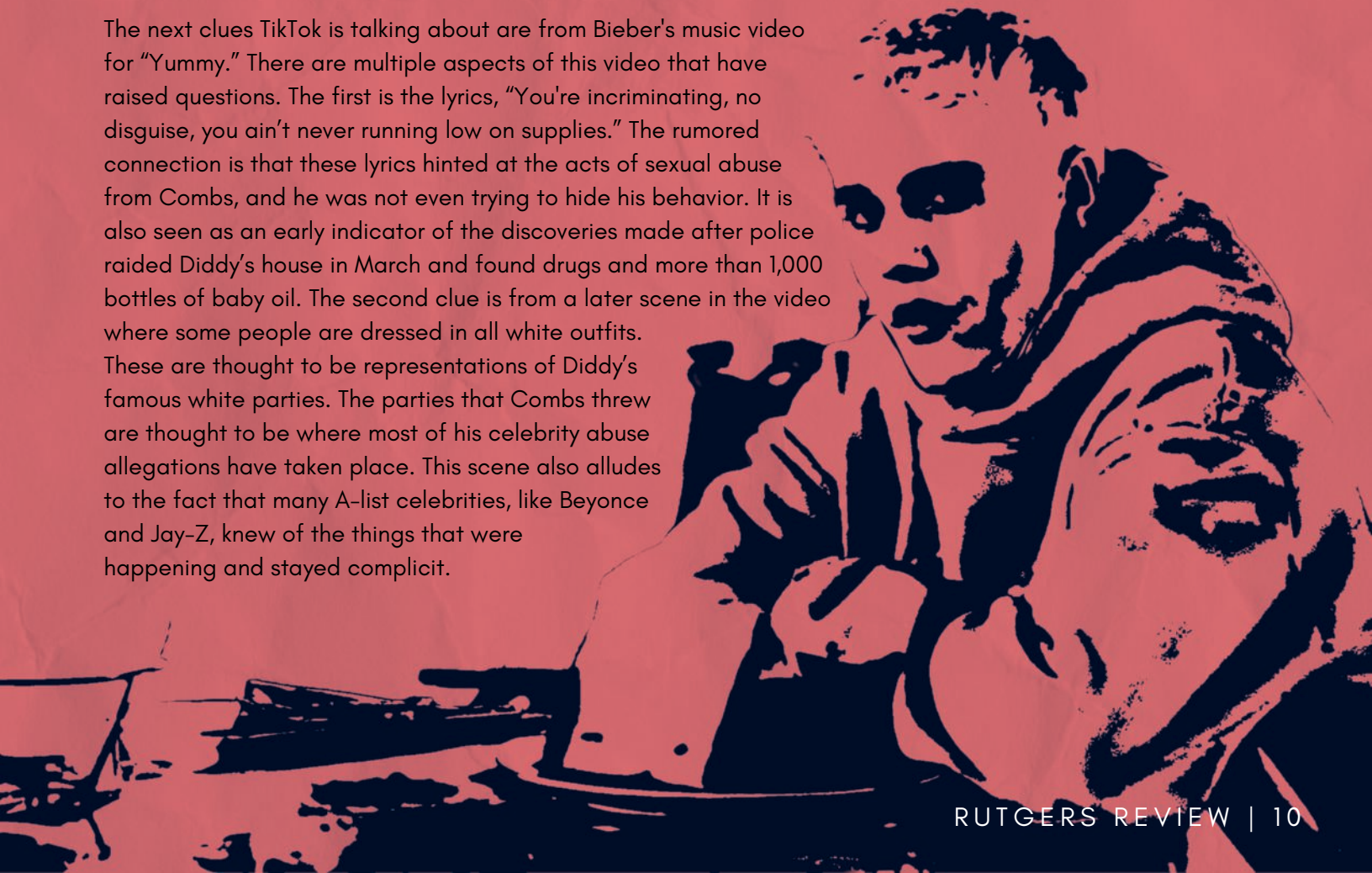
WHAT IS REAL AND WHAT IS RUMOR?

by Greta Vassallo

The story flooding your TikTok For You page: the P-Diddy parties and celebrity abuse allegations. Sean 'Diddy' Combs has been charged with multiple cases of sexual abuse, sex trafficking, racketeering, and transportation for prostitution. The claims began in November 2023 with Cassie Ventura, who was signed to his record label and dated him for many years. Since then, there have been multiple lawsuits and a recent arrest made on September 16th. Social media users have been diving into the cases and speculating celebrities' involvement and knowledge of the acts that occurred at Combs' famous parties. One of the most discussed celebrity victims has been Justin Bieber, who spent a lot of time with the rapper when he was first starting out in the music industry at 15 years old. After the allegations against Combs and his arrest, fans began wondering if they could find any clues as to what truly happened between Bieber and Combs. The online speculation and drama surrounding this story highlights just how dominating of a tool social media can be in shaping the narrative of news and ideas.

The online investigation began when old videos and interviews he's done in the past reemerged from Bieber's YouTube channel. In the YouTube video, Combs jokes that he has custody of Justin for the 48 hours they are spending together. While he wouldn't disclose what they will be doing, he said it would be a 15 year olds dream day. This has been disturbing to viewers, as Justin was so young at the time and Combs was 40 years old. This video is from 2009 and is only two minutes long. It probably hasn't had a single view in 10 years, but after Combs arrest, everything from both his and Bieber's past has been dug up for TikTok to sort through. Another video that has resurfaced is from a 2022 interview Bieber had with Zane Lowe. He discusses the trauma he experienced at a young age in the music industry. Here Bieber gets very emotional talking about how he wants to protect close friend and singer Billie Eilish from going through the same things he did. He does not directly state in the interview what he is referring to or if it is about Combs, but it has been interpreted that way online.

The next clues TikTok is talking about are from Bieber's music video for "Yummy." There are multiple aspects of this video that have raised questions. The first is the lyrics, "You're incriminating, no disguise, you ain't never running low on supplies." The rumored connection is that these lyrics hinted at the acts of sexual abuse from Combs, and he was not even trying to hide his behavior. It is also seen as an early indicator of the discoveries made after police raided Diddy's house in March and found drugs and more than 1,000 bottles of baby oil. The second clue is from a later scene in the video where some people are dressed in all white outfits. These are thought to be representations of Diddy's famous white parties. The parties that Combs threw are thought to be where most of his celebrity abuse allegations have taken place. This scene also alludes to the fact that many A-list celebrities, like Beyonce and Jay-Z, knew of the things that were happening and stayed complicit.





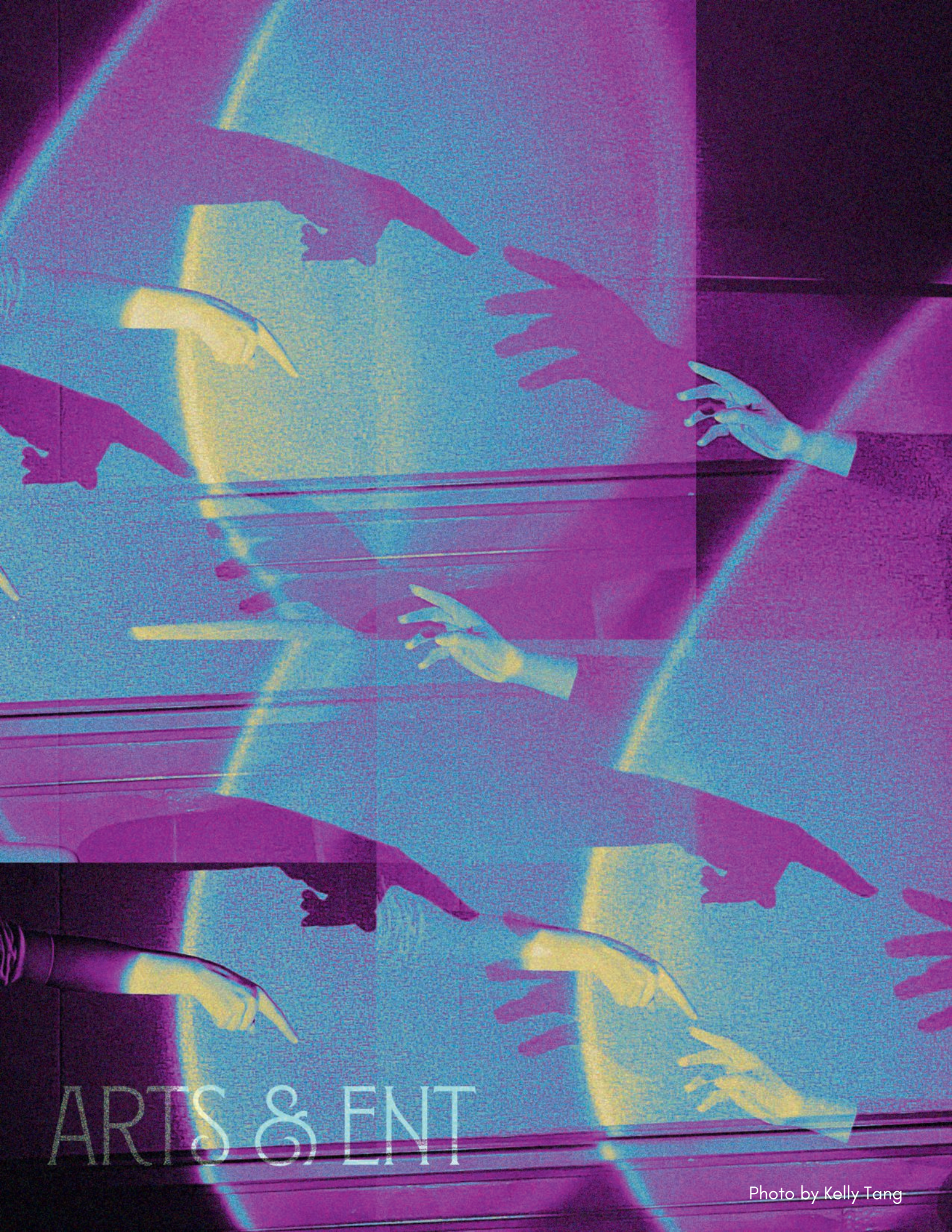
While the relation between Bieber's music video and Diddy's crimes has been heavily discussed online, Justin has made no statement confirming if these two things are related. With social media having such a strong influence, it is not surprising that users have formed an opinion from online assumptions and a few TikTok videos rather than waiting to hear Justin's confirmation for what his truth is. This further illustrates how powerful social media has been in controlling the narrative for not only the Diddy cases, but also for Justin's story and experiences.

The last clue is from Bieber's viral TikTok song, "Lost Myself at a Diddy Party." The song spread like wildfire on TikTok and Youtube and viewers can't believe Justin finally said something. The lyrics go on to say, "I was in it for a new Ferrari, but it cost me way more than my soul." These lyrics show how Justin was spending time with Combs for fame, connections and even a cool car, but it ended up being very damaging to his life and experience in the music industry. These lyrics seemed to confirm all the speculation and conspiracy theories about Justin's experiences with Diddy and the symbols out there. Despite the eagerness of conspiracy theorists to accept this new piece of evidence, it was confirmed that the song and lyrics were fully AI generated. This song is completely fabricated by AI and

misrepresents the real story. Creating fake "evidence" is so damaging and attempts to discredit the very real trial and investigation that Combs is being held responsible for now.

In recent years, so many negative things have been said about Justin Bieber. Many put a strong focus on mistakes he made as a teenager or young adult without considering any other factors. He repeatedly has had incidents with the law both in the states and in Canada, so for many years this was tied to his reputation. However, now after the spread of the Diddy story and how Justin may have been a part of it, the perspective on Justin and his life has done a full 180. In any TikTok, Youtube, or Instagram comments, all you see is a flood of support and understanding of his situation. It seems like no one really took what Bieber was saying seriously or cared to consider what he was going through being in the music industry at such a young age- until this bit of information spread through social media. While Justin has been accountable for his actions, shown growth and revealed his struggles over the years, no one seemed to notice until now. The overwhelming amount of online content and controversy that came from the story gave people an opportunity to change their perspective. There may have been people who supported Justin earlier, but it is much easier to agree with the majority opinion rather than receive backlash for telling yours. Ultimately, social media has played a huge role in influencing this narrative of this conflict and has confused many about what is real or fake news.





ARTS & ENT

Photo by Kelly Tang

HOW THE JUICE GOT LOOSE (AGAIN)

a *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice* review by Amber Safeer



In an age where sequels, prequels, spin-offs, and live-action adaptations are the only things keeping sinking companies afloat, it's rare to find a movie that isn't a total cash grab intended to prey on people's nostalgia. I mean, really—who needs both a live-action *Moana* AND a *Moana 2*? It's as if movie studios (looking at you, Disney) are practically announcing to the public that they have run out of original ideas.

That being said, I encountered one sequel in the last few months that exceeded my expectations exponentially—Tim Burton's *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice*. When I went to see this in theaters with my mom, I admit I was initially quite nervous; how could a franchise from over 35 years ago be rekindled in a tasteful way? I half expected the main characters to awkwardly use Gen Z lingo and act like social media influencers to fit in with the current crowd.

However, I was pleasantly surprised to find that not only did I enjoy the sequel, but it also brought justice to the original film in a refreshing way. Perhaps it was a passion project for Tim Burton, or maybe because they brought back most of the original cast, but something about it just worked for me. While I was heartbroken that Adam and Barbara Maitland did not make it into the film, their absence allowed for a seamless transition to include Jenna Ortega's new character, Astrid Deetz.

If you haven't seen the film, the plot centers around Astrid Deetz, daughter of Winona Ryder's iconic character, Lydia Deetz. She is about the same age Lydia was in the first movie, although that's about all they have in common. Astrid holds resentment against Lydia because her mother, essentially a medium, can contact every ghost except for the one Astrid cares about most—her dad. However, the two are brought together (along with Delia Deetz) to mourn the loss of Lydia's father, Charles, in the house where the original movie takes place.

Long story short, a portal to the afterlife is discovered, Astrid enters, and Betelgeuse is called upon to help save her (as chaos and mayhem ensue, of course).

Now, don't get me wrong—the story isn't terribly awe-inspiring. Truthfully, I think there was a lot of potential that Burton was trying to explore, but it couldn't all work in one film. On one hand, you have Lydia trying to overcome her chronic people-pleasing while being in a toxic relationship with her TV show's producer (oh, did I forget to mention that she now hosts a paranormal investigation show?).



On the other hand, we're randomly introduced to Betelgeuse's ex-wife, Delores, the "soul-sucker," who we think might be the big bad of the movie. The truth, though? There is no clear villain in this film. You have Rory (Lydia's horrible producer and boyfriend), Jeremy Frazier (a murderous ghost who uses Astrid to regain his life), Delores (a demon trying to kill Betelgeuse), and—wait a second. Isn't Betelgeuse supposed to be, I don't know, the main antagonist of *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice*?

Strange. When looking back at the 1988 film, it's clear that Betelgeuse is the (albeit incredibly witty and lovable) villain. Here, though, it's almost as if he has become a member of the family. Sure, he's not a great person by any means, but at most, he scrounges up some wacky hijinks and witty banter that we all know and love. In fact, this almost feels as though Burton is taking a page from the hit Broadway musical, leaning into the comedic aspects of Michael Keaton's Betelgeuse rather than the horrifying, repulsive parts.

This isn't necessarily a bad thing. In fact, that comedy is part of the reason why I love the musical (and now this movie) so much. However, the absence of a clear antagonist and the multitude of plotlines make it all a bit convoluted. If Burton had focused on just one storyline and built the plot around that, it would have been more cohesive. Instead, we have a jumble of puzzle pieces that don't quite fit together.

So, what exactly did the film do right? It was consistent. It built a sequel that, while unnecessary, pays homage to the original movie and creates a realistic future. It's entirely believable that Lydia would use her paranormal powers to help others, or that Delia would remain relatively unchanged in her pursuit of fame and fortune. The character development and the way the new characters fit into the world just make sense. The overall vibes of the movie also remain eerie—not a horror film, but certainly not made for kids. The visual gags, witty banter, and heart-wrenching story, despite the comedy and horror, are all present, which is why I think this sequel was done so well. It's clear this was not meant to be a soulless cash grab. This is especially evident in those aforementioned subplots, as Burton and the rest of the crew had so many ideas for expanding this universe because they were passionate about it. Maybe it could have been better paced as a show, or scaled back to fit a movie format. It certainly wasn't perfect, but I can admire and appreciate the dedication that went into making this sequel such a fun watch.

Though, one question remains: when will we get

**BEETLEJUICE
BEETLEJUICE
BEETLEJUICE?**



Winter Romantic-Comedies Watchlist

By Sanskriti Ramji



It's wintertime, which means it's officially acceptable to indulge in comfort movies on the couch, wrapped in a big blanket and fuzzy socks. As a self-proclaimed romantic-comedy enthusiast—with my very own Letterboxd list and Spotify playlist to prove it—I have plenty of material to work through this season. So, I thought I'd share some of my cozy favorites that will keep you warm this winter.

You've Got Mail: Technically, this film takes place throughout the year, but its nostalgic bookstore backdrop is perfect for the holidays. Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks expressively portray a genuine yet humorous romance that slowly unfolds, mirroring our growing anticipation for the holiday season. You'll come to love the characters' quirks and appreciate the conflicts they face as they fall in love, especially as the plot adds more layers. Filled with beloved romantic tropes—from enemies to lovers, friends to lovers, and even a bit of mistaken identity—you'll want to stay for the entire ride. I have no doubt this classic will become a must-watch on your holiday list every year, treating you to many snuggled-up viewings.





***Serendipity*:** Set in New York City, this movie offers the perfect love-at-first-sight romance that college students constantly dream about, keeping you hopeful (and perhaps a bit delusional) from beginning to end. I must warn you, though, that at times you may find yourself screaming at the TV as the characters literally try to find their relationship amid suspenseful twists and turns. It's worth it, though, because Kate Beckinsale and John Cusack's chemistry will have you rooting for them alongside their entertaining sidekicks. I'm so glad my parents introduced my sister and me to this film, and I'm excited to share this family favorite with all of you! Bonus points if you visit the movie's namesake dessert restaurant featured in one of my favorite scenes!



***When Harry Met Sally*:** Like many cinematic masterpieces, this one begins with a road trip. This unique rom-com takes you through the characters' relationship over many years, evolving from acquaintances who randomly bump into each other to friends (and possibly more) who choose to be in each other's lives. The humorous banter and back-and-forth arguments between the leads will keep you laughing, especially with Meg Ryan and Billy Crystal's goofy, relatable expressions and committed performances (cue the iconic diner scene). The film also showcases some even more iconic winter outfits. Best of all, the characters' honest and evolving perspectives on each other will prompt you to contemplate deep questions about love and friendship—all from the comfort of your couch. If you appreciate a true slow-burn romance with characters who gradually learn to embrace each other's quirks, this one's for you.



***Sleepless in Seattle*:** I know, another Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks movie, but this one is special for very different reasons. It begins with a touch of tragedy but compensates by exploring various types of love, including a beautiful, wholesome father-son relationship. The characters' lives align in unlikely yet fateful ways, instilling hope even after loss. The involvement of a devoted child makes the romance feel pure and meaningful. Not only that, but the characters' sense of responsibility and their contradictory feelings are relatable, keeping you engaged until the very final scene. I'd recommend this movie to both romantic-comedy lovers and cynics alike, as it portrays real people falling in love in an unexpected manner while grappling with the same worries and doubts anyone in their position would share. The winter scenery serves as a poignant reminder that we can meet people during the more solitary and challenging seasons of our lives.



***Notting Hill*:** Many of us have wondered what a relationship with a celebrity would be like, and this movie allows us to enjoy that experience. Julia Roberts and Hugh Grant slowly navigate a complicated relationship, revealing the vulnerabilities of falling in love, especially when the entire world weighs in. Both characters honestly confront their flaws and insecurities, showcasing the genuine nature of their bond. I also appreciate how this romantic comedy highlights the crucial role friends play in helping us find partners, often making light of otherwise mortifying situations. Above all, this film is a quieter, slower watch that unfolds an unrealistic plot in a more relatable way, making it enjoyable for both fans and non-fans of the genre alike.



Photo by Katherine Costa

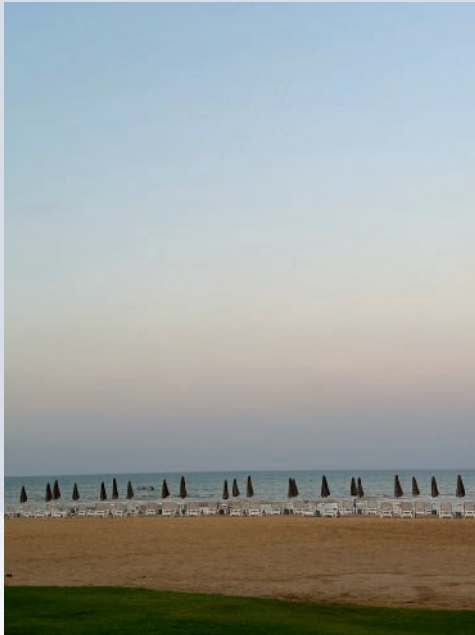


Photo by Katherine Costa



Photo by Katherine Costa

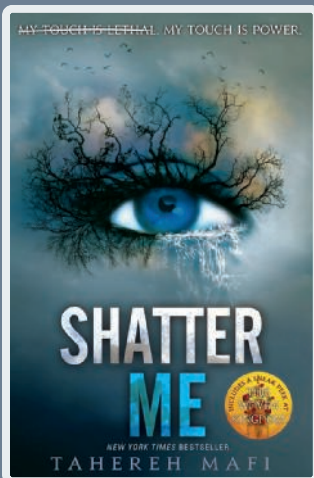


Photo by Akansha Singh

TRUST US, YOU'LL WANT TO READ THIS

By Hermeline Berteloot and Ella Easton

We're excited to share some book recommendations based on popular BookTok favorites. Our goal is to guide you toward new reads, whether you loved the BookTok books or are looking for something a little different. That being said, we want to make one thing clear: there's no shame in enjoying popular books, and you don't have to dive into obscure works to be considered a "real" reader. Whether you're sticking with what you love or branching out, we hope these recommendations inspire your next read! So sit back, enjoy, and trust us: you'll want to read these recommendations.



Arguably one of the most popular YA fantasy novels on BookTok, *Shatter Me* and its sequels provide a perfect entry point for this conversation. This collection of novels quickly gained traction on BookTok in recent years, despite being released more than a decade ago. Personally, I have read—and greatly appreciated—every single word Tahereh Mafi has written regarding this series.

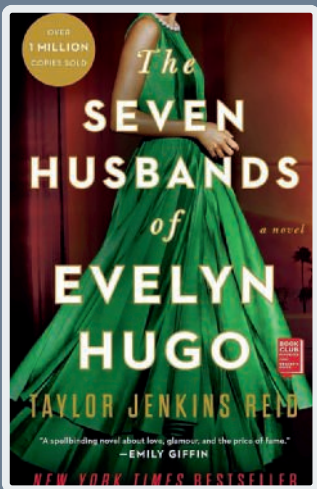
Shatter Me follows a young girl, Juliette Ferrars, who has the ability to kill people with a single touch. Isolated from the world for practically her entire life, the effects of this isolation on her psyche are palpable in the first novel, told from her perspective. The series chronicles Juliette's journey alongside a group of other stray teenagers as they attempt to bring some semblance of peace to their corrupt and chaotic world. When I first read this novel as a fresh-faced 15-year-old, I found joy and self-acceptance along with the characters, deeply relating to the main protagonist.

If you enjoyed this series as much as I did, I highly recommend *The Unbecoming of Mara Dyer* by Michelle Hodkin. While the Mara Dyer trilogy falls under the genres of paranormal fiction, mystery, and psychological thriller, if you liked *Shatter Me*, I can almost guarantee you will enjoy this series. Don't be afraid to expand your reading palette!

The Unbecoming of Mara Dyer follows, you guessed it, Mara Dyer: a young teenage girl who has just survived a tragic accident that killed her friends. Mara and her family move to a new town hoping for a fresh start, but she still grapples with memories of that fateful day. She soon discovers the possibility that she has supernatural abilities linked to the tragedy. The series follows her and yet another group of stray teenagers as they seek to uncover their own powers along with Mara's truth.

Both stories explore themes of found family, romance, suspense, and so much more that readers (myself included) eagerly consume.

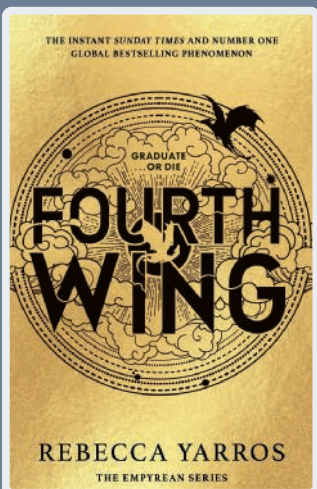
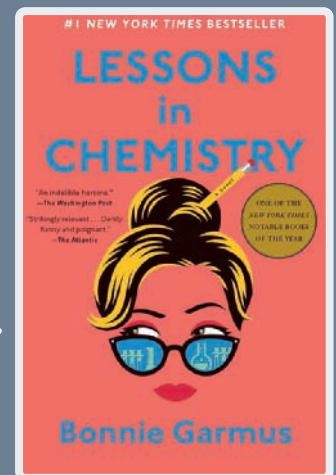




Taylor Jenkins Reid, an immensely popular author with a plethora of successful books, began her rise to fame around the same time BookTok emerged. Four out of her eight novels have been on the New York Times Best Seller list, including *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*. Personally, I found this book beautifully written and exceptionally moving.

The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo recounts the life of a glamorous and notorious Hollywood icon, detailing her seven husbands and—SPOILER ALERT—her wife. This novel explores themes of sexuality, grief, and identity, all woven into a beautiful narrative of past and present. We follow Evelyn's life alongside that of the reporter covering her story. Similarly, we have the masterpiece that is *Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus—my favorite read of 2023 and possibly my all-time favorite.

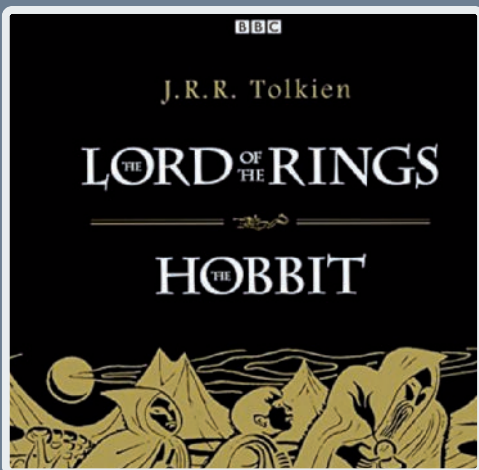
Lessons in Chemistry follows Elizabeth Zott, a female chemist in the 1960s—you can surely draw your own conclusions about the main conflict here. This novel is narrated by an omniscient voice, even sharing the feelings of Elizabeth's dog—an extremely interesting and powerful narrative style. Elizabeth is an unconventional woman for her time, unapologetically herself, much like Miss Hugo. As contemporary fiction, both novels touch on issues such as loss, women's empowerment, and challenging societal norms.



If you spend as much time on BookTok as I do, you've definitely heard of Rebecca Yarros' *Fourth Wing*. I read it in January—just a few months after its release—because it kept popping up on my TikTok feed. I remember really enjoying *Fourth Wing*. However, I know not everyone felt the same way. From what I've gathered, many readers were expecting more depth from an adult fantasy series, which is fair enough.

If you share this sentiment, I believe Mai Corland's debut novel, *Five Broken Blades*, could be a perfect fit. For those who loved *Fourth Wing* but are looking to expand their adult fantasy reading, this is right up your alley. *Five Broken Blades* follows five characters, each carrying their own burdens (their own "broken blades"), as they come together to assassinate the immortal God King Joon, the tyrant ruling over Yusan. It's told from each character's perspective, which might seem overwhelming at first, but trust me, you'll quickly become attached to each one. What truly sets this book apart for me is how Corland seamlessly weaves discussions of race, gender, and political conflict through the characters' interactions.





Since this is her debut novel, there are definitely some missing pieces, and I found myself wishing the story had focused a bit less on the romance and more on certain events and themes. That said, it's still a great starting point for anyone looking to branch out into epic high fantasy stories that demand a little more brainpower—think along the lines of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien's work, while a classic, sets the stage for many modern fantasies with its richly developed world, epic journeys, and intricate characters. For me, *Five Broken Blades* delivers that same sense of lore and adventure while weaving in contemporary themes like social justice, identity, and just enough romance to keep things light.

If you've been looking to broaden your fantasy reading scope, I believe this might work well for you. I hope you enjoy these stories as much as I did!



As a romance reader—like many of us—I can confidently say that Ali Hazelwood has captivated a wide audience. Her STEM-based romances have become immensely popular, and even though I'm not a STEM girlie, there's something enchanting about love stories set in the world of science. I've read all her books (except *Bride*), and I've enjoyed each one.

If you loved Hazelwood's work and want to explore something a little different, or if her novels didn't quite resonate and you seek romance with deeper themes, Emily Henry's books may be a perfect match.

I'm sure we've all heard of Emily Henry, and I'm here to confirm the hype. Her books strike a perfect balance

between serious and fun, featuring well-developed romantic relationships that feel authentic and layered. Henry weaves in heavier themes—grief, identity, and self-discovery—without losing the lightheartedness of a good romance.



For those transitioning into literary fiction, I recommend any of her books. They all feature that satisfying romance we love, with added depth that elevates them beyond simple love stories. And for anyone who has had Jane Austen's works on their shelves for years (been there), starting with authors like Emily Henry can be incredibly helpful. Establishing a steady reading habit can make diving into classics like Austen's much less daunting.

Ali Hazelwood and Emily Henry both shine in their own right, catering to different vibes. They have each helped me branch out into classic romances and other sub-genres, and I hope they can do the same for you!




Why You Should Watch Arcane (No, It's Not Just for LoL Players)

BY: NIKHITA KUMAR

The highly anticipated second season of the fantasy-action show *Arcane* hit Netflix this November. The first season, released in 2021, was a smash hit—even winning “Best Animated Program” at the Emmys—and many fans are eagerly awaiting what new twists and turns are in store for them this season. However, if some readers are hesitant about watching the show, I’m here to tell you why you should, in fact, watch *Arcane*. Immediately. For those who have already watched *Arcane*, let this piece refresh your memory on why this show is so amazing!

Just to get it out of the way: no, you do not need to play *League of Legends* to understand what’s happening in *Arcane*. While *League* is well-known for its incredibly rich and detailed lore, it’s equally notorious for being difficult for beginners (not to mention its toxic fanbase). If you’re worried about having to play the game to fully appreciate the show, never fear: *Arcane* does an incredible job of expanding upon the lore of its setting—specifically, Piltover, a beautiful city of progress and innovation, and Zaun, its oppressed, crime-filled underbelly—without confusing the viewer. If the show gets you interested in the game, that’s great! You can absolutely learn more about the lore of *Arcane*’s world through playing it. However, it’s not necessary for enjoying the show.

For those of you who don’t care about the show’s connection to *League*, but aren’t sure if you’d be interested in *Arcane*’s story and characters, never fear—the show boasts a multilayered narrative with a diverse, well-developed ensemble cast. *Arcane* centers around the brewing tensions between the wealthy city of Piltover and its oppressed underground city, Zaun. Their turbulent relationship descends into greater chaos with the creation of magic-technology hextech and the dangerous enhancement drug Shimmer. The show explores the consequences of these developments through the eyes of several main characters, each with distinct personalities and motivations. There’s hotheaded Zaunite Vi, who will stop at nothing to find her younger sister; volatile Zaunite criminal Jinx, whose trigger-happy exterior conceals a fragile mind; intelligent researcher Viktor, whose deadly illness won’t deter him from improving lives; Enforcer (and Piltover citizen) Caitlyn, whose journey to quash criminal activity brings her out of her privileged shell; and idealistic inventor Jayce, whose dreams of bettering Piltover are challenged by his new political responsibilities amid rising tensions between the cities. There are other key characters whom the audience can follow. The benefit of having multiple perspectives is that you can choose whom to root for. Rather than being forced to watch just one main character whom you might not even like, you can enjoy a wide range of characters with varying subplots that appeal to every viewer. In short, there’s something here for everyone!

The background of the page is a dark, atmospheric illustration from the animated series Arcane. It features a character with long, flowing blue hair, likely Jinx, in the center. The scene is filled with intricate mechanical details, including gears and pipes, and is lit with vibrant, multi-colored light effects in shades of blue, green, and red, creating a sense of depth and drama.

Besides the amazing story and characters, the animation of this show is also something to marvel at. If you need proof that animation isn't just for kids, just look at *Arcane*. The animation is beautifully crafted, with each frame resembling a painting, perfectly blending realism with artistry. There are gorgeous shots in the show that will take your breath away. The show's animated style never detracts from the viewer's immersion; in fact, it enhances it. Live-action shows, even with the use of CGI, tend to be limited in what they can portray. Some things just don't translate well into live action. By contrast, there are really no limits to what you can portray in animation. Scenes of powerful magic, action-packed fight sequences, and immensely detailed backdrops of both Piltover and Zaun are all incredibly depicted in *Arcane*'s animation style. *Arcane* doesn't have a single bad frame. Don't believe me? Just watch the show!

Last but not least is the music. *Arcane* features both an original score and a soundtrack, with incredible songs used at the best moments for emotional highs and lows.

Good songs either get you hyped up and ready to go, or make you sit and ponder your feelings for a while. *Arcane* features songs that do both. You can nod your head to the incredible beat of the intro song "Enemy," which has meaningful lyrics that get you hyped for every episode. At the same time, you can feel the emotional punches of the beautiful song "Guns For Hire," with lyrics that express the intense guilt and sorrow of the character central to the song. If you're looking for a track that delivers both hype and emotional depth, "Dynasties and Dystopia" (which is, in the author's opinion, the best song in the show) does just that. Set during an intense fight scene, "Dynasties and Dystopia" gets the viewers hyped up for an epic battle, but also stirs sadness as they watch the tragic memories between the characters fighting. If music is something you value when watching shows, then *Arcane* has plenty for you to appreciate.

If any of these elements appeal to you, watch *Arcane*! From detailed characters to amazing songs, there are so many wonderful aspects of the show. There are many other incredible elements in the show that weren't even mentioned in this article. With the release of the second (and final) season, why not take this excellent opportunity to binge the entire show?

book review:

BETTER THAN THE MOVIES

Review by: Sanskriti Ramji

LYNN PAINTER

For the longest time, I've always wanted to be someone who reads casually or just for fun, but my impatience and quick judgments of books have always gotten in the way. Even as a kid, my reading logs were filled with comic books (which I maintain are real books) rather than the novels that many of my classmates were enjoying. This summer, when I resolved to read an over-500-page biography, I knew there was a chance I would abandon it as usual, but I never imagined it would lead me to finish a different book. In deciding to pick up a "less serious," more "fast-paced" book, I found myself taking an interest in *Better Than the Movies* by Lynn Painter. Little did I know how timely this reading would be given the sequel's recent release, and I thought a review might help you decide if the series is worth your time.


“DESPITE COMING HIGHLY RECOMMENDED BY MY MORE INTELLECTUAL, BOOKISH FRIENDS, I WAS INITIALLY A BIT SKEPTICAL.”

Remembering some of the romantic dialogues from Young Adult novels I had read in previous years made me nervous about encountering cringey and unrealistic interactions that would never happen in real life. Yet, the book pleasantly surprised me with its allusions to my favorite romantic comedies and a strong female protagonist who wants to fall in love while also holding on to her sense of self.

I'll start by saying that this book will definitely appeal more to hopeless romantics and fans of romantic tropes, thanks to the plot and Liz's infatuation with true love. That said, her enjoyment of romance is tied to her mother (trigger warning for anyone sensitive to death or loss), making it relatable to readers across genres, as it explores the human need to form attachments to what those we cherish hold dear. Liz's relationship with her mother provides context for what she looks for in a potential partner as she navigates interactions with both her crush, Michael, and her "enemy," Wes, who helps her score a prom date with Michael. Painter does a great job of showing us Liz's perspective; I found myself feeling conflicted, confused, and even emotional at the same moments as her, wishing the other characters could understand her thought process—a universal part of teenage girlhood.

Now, I'm definitely not an avid reader like many of you, but I know that buildup is crucial for romance readers. I think this book does a decent job, as Wes and Liz's collusion realistically begins as a mutually beneficial deal that slowly blossoms into a comfortable, trusting friendship where both characters have revelations about each other. Even if we haven't all experienced falling in love (I certainly haven't), we can relate to the beauty of bonds that develop in seemingly random ways, ultimately becoming our most treasured relationships. Furthermore, the setup of two childhood friends and neighbors rediscovering each other during a transitional year fills you with nostalgia and relatable fears of growing up, along with the hopeful sentiment that love can be waiting for you anywhere—even at your back door. Liz and Wes's natural banter, honest conversations over a backyard fire pit, and their enjoyment of teasing and plotting against each other create an obvious tension that always feels close to being broken.

In terms of the plot itself, there isn't much to it, but its simplicity keeps you engaged and eager to find out what will happen next—namely, who Liz's prom date will be. Honestly, there were moments that felt a bit repetitive, such as her constant mishaps when talking to Michael, which, even if symbolic, led to some boredom for me. However, I argue that even these slightly cringey, hard-to-watch scenes are necessary for bringing Liz and Wes closer while escalating Liz's internal conflict, ultimately pushing the plot forward. I'll also add that the final outcome wouldn't be as satisfying if readers didn't have to work a little to enjoy the happy ending. Still, the story has a very structured and predictable plot—from the buildup to the conflict and the final resolution—so if you're looking for something new or adventurous, this book probably isn't for you. As for the ending (spoilers ahead), I was elated when Liz finally realized that her plotting with Wes had been more important to her than ending up with Michael, and their prom night closing with the beginning of Liz and Wes's relationship was perfect. Personally, I felt a connection to Liz by the end, and I was proud of her for mending her friendship with Jocelyn after abandoning it in pursuit of boys, as well as for overcoming her fears and embracing her stepmom.



SO, MY FINAL VERDICT: I GIVE THIS BOOK A SOLID 7/10.

For the first book I've read in a while that's not for a class, it was pretty entertaining and easy for anyone to read. I also appreciated the quotes from popular romantic comedies at the beginning of each chapter. The lack of creativity definitely left something to be desired, and it goes beyond just having a familiar plot structure. I realized about halfway through that the dynamic between Liz and Wes, some scenes (especially the Secret Area and mall shopping ones), not to mention Wes's name, felt like they were taken directly from the 2015 movie *The Duff*. I looked it up on TikTok to see if anyone else had noticed, and there's a broader discourse about the uncanny similarities online. This strange realization, combined with my earlier concerns, makes me feel that I can't give Painter too much credit for my enjoyment, though I appreciate that she created a character who loves romance and pop culture references that her audience can enjoy. This unusual coincidence aside, *Better Than the Movies* is still a great read if you're looking for a stress-buster written from a sweet, sentimental perspective about growing up, finding oneself, and in that process, finding love. I especially admired the cinematic playlist Wes and Liz curated for their "friendship," available at the back of the book and on Spotify! Finally, my satisfaction with the ending is exactly why I don't think I will be giving the sequel a shot. In my mind, I want to leave things just as they ended and imagine the happily ever after for myself. In fact, I think that's a good indicator that the ending achieved a strong, independent resolution. I will be keeping an eye out for more Lynn Painter books because I identify with her sense of humor and vivid daydreaming packed into a writing style compatible with my very casual reading level.

drop everything you're
doing & watch

GRAVITY FALLS

by amber safeer



On June 15, 2012, the world (or at least my world) was changed forever. And before you ask, no, that is not an exaggeration. It is on this very day that the hit animated show *Gravity Falls*, created by Alex Hirsch, was released.

If you are relatively unfamiliar with the series, I can hear you asking, “Is she talking about that dorky kids’ show on Disney?”

While I begrudgingly say “yes,” I assure you—it is anything but just a children’s TV show. It is the product of incredible animation, a thrilling story, lovable characters, a stacked voice acting team, and humor that stands the test of time. Over and over again, I find myself returning to this show not just because it brings me nostalgia, but because it truly is that enjoyable at all stages of life.

The series follows twins Dipper and Mabel Pines as they encounter fun mysteries while staying at their Great Uncle’s (Grunkle’s) house in Gravity Falls, Oregon for the summer. What starts out as innocent fun quickly develops into an intense story that lasts just two seasons before your heart is ripped apart because it ends as soon as it begins. So what makes this show so good?

For me, one of the biggest draws is its relatability. Based heavily on the creator’s own life, the themes depicted in the show perfectly capture those pivotal, awkward tween years we all experience. Despite the crazy adventures the twins embark on, the world Hirsch built feels so believable because the characters themselves are written so authentically. It’s almost as if you

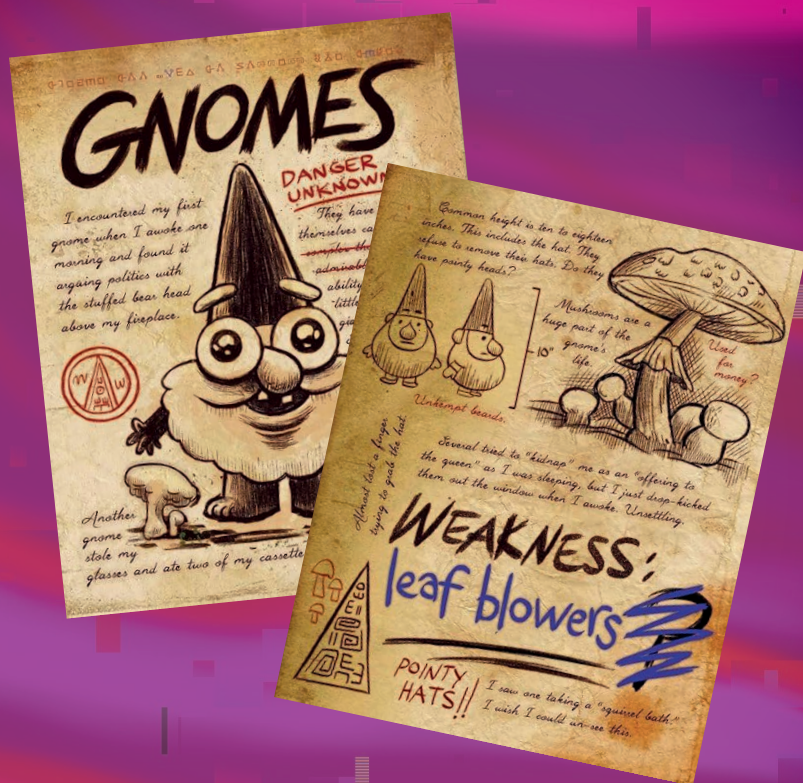
are part of the story (and technically, you are, but that’s a later point).

Moreover, the plot of *Gravity Falls* is also one of its greatest strengths. Somehow, the writers created a show that can be enjoyed casually (like a sitcom) or intensely analyzed frame by frame for clues hinting at the lore hidden deeper behind the screen. The show flawlessly melds sci-fi, coming-of-age, fantasy, romance, and comedy genres, satisfying viewers of all interests. They also expertly set up multiple antagonists (of varying concerns), character arcs, and plot twists in just two seasons! While some have begged for more seasons, a movie, or perhaps a spinoff, I believe *Gravity Falls* is one of the few modern TV shows that knew when to stop. The story was wrapped up, and although there may have been a few loose threads, it still felt like a complete conclusion. Two seasons were just enough (and two seasons are also extremely bingeable if you’re in the market!).



So... if this show ended all the way back in 2016, why am I talking about it now? Well, just because the show ended doesn't mean the flow of content did. Most notably, two very important novels were published in recent years, adding to the *Gravity Falls* universe: *Journal 3* and *The Book of Bill*. For a bit of context, *Journal 3* (published right after the series ended in 2016) is a reimagining of the cryptic journal of the same name found in the animated series, complete with eye-catching drawings of new monsters, secret codes, and some character backstory we were all yearning for.

Released over eight years after the show aired its season finale, *The Book of Bill* accomplishes a similar feat. Instead of bringing an in-universe object to life, this novel conceptualizes what is going on inside the mind of *Gravity Falls*' greatest antagonist—Bill Cipher, a triangular-shaped demon from the second dimension.



Not only do we receive direct narration from this beloved villain in the book, but we were also gifted communication with him via a website (ThisIsNotAWebsiteDotCom.com). When the internet got their hands on this piece of information, they spiraled. If you take the time to check it out, you'll find what appears to be the Mystery Shack (where Dipper and Mabel are staying for the summer), *The Book of Bill* with a dagger stabbed through the cover, and a computer with a text box for inputs.

As mentioned, this show does not hold back when it comes to secret ciphers, hidden codes, and deep lore. All of these new "easter eggs" continue to fuel the fandom's fire and passion for the show. That's not even to mention the infamous "Cipher Hunt" that occurred back in 2016—an alternate reality game (ARG) that took fans on a real-life quest to search for the statue of Bill Cipher. Evidently, Alex Hirsch is not done with *Gravity Falls*. While the animated show may be over, I am confident that we will continue to see more content in the years to come, perhaps in the form of a graphic novel, a video game, or something else entirely.

If you are still unconvinced to watch this show, then I leave you with a Latin quote from the first few pages of *Journal 3*: "Ad astra, per aspera."

To the stars, through hardship.

Because that is exactly what *Gravity Falls* is about—fighting through madness and adversity to ultimately achieve peace and happiness.

JOKER 2 REVIEW

By: Greta Vassallo

The highly anticipated sequel featuring the famous DC villain was released on October 4, 2024. *Joker: Folie à Deux* explores how the Joker meets the love of his life and partner in crime, Lee Quinzel, the film's incarnation of Harley Quinn. Their paths cross at Arkham State Hospital, where the Joker is imprisoned, and Lee resides in the mental facility. The narrative centers around the Joker's upcoming trial for multiple murder counts after his televised murder spree shocked the city.

The first movie set high expectations for this sequel, and I was eager to see a mix of action and romance after watching the trailer. However, only one of those elements made it into the film. Before viewing, I was excited to learn about the origins of Harley Quinn and the Joker's relationship. Their connection was one of my favorite aspects, thanks to the actors' incredible chemistry. Their craziness complemented each other perfectly, creating an intense bond that was a joy to watch. Lady Gaga was perfectly cast as Lee, portraying the character as mysterious and multi-faceted.

Unfortunately, aside from their developing connection, the storyline was hard to follow and not what I expected. While the characters' relationship was intriguing, the film lacked a clear narrative and the action that fans typically look forward to in DC movies.

One unexpected aspect of the film was its musical format, which was not hinted at in the trailer. This left me feeling confused and out of place.





While the scenes of chaotic love and a hectic trial were entertaining, many would have been more thrilling without the musical numbers. The constant transitions from dialogue to song made it difficult to stay engaged; I found myself waiting for those scenes to end. The musical element detracted from the serious issues the Joker faced, redirecting the audience's attention toward a performance rather than a cohesive story.

If I could change one thing about this film, it would be to cut out most of the songs. A stronger focus on action drama could have allowed for a deeper exploration of the romance and chaos between the Joker and Harley Quinn. This approach would have made the courtroom scenes more impactful, without songs overshadowing the conflict. If musical elements had to be included, a single central duet between the Joker and Harley Quinn could have effectively conveyed the importance of music in their relationship without dominating the film.

Another aspect I would change is the ending. The film concludes with the Joker back in prison, where a random inmate stabs him and leaves him to die. The inmate claims the Joker is getting what he deserves and then carves the classic Joker smile into his own face. This moment is intended to symbolize that Arthur will never be the Joker that Lee and his supporters wanted him to be. However, this abrupt ending leaves the audience with nothing to ponder or anticipate for the Joker's future.

Overall, this film offers little hope for a third installment, as the story appears to conclude here. Given its poor performance at the box office, it might be best for DC to end this movie series while they can.



MUSIC

A photograph of a crowd at a concert. The image is split horizontally into two identical panels. In the top panel, the word "MUSIC" is written in a large, white, serif font in the upper right corner. The background of the entire image is a bright, hazy sky with soft, out-of-focus clouds. In the foreground, the silhouettes of a crowd of people are visible, with their arms raised in the air. Some hands are forming heart shapes, while others are open or in various expressive poses. The overall mood is one of joy and celebration.

Photo by Brian Kataro

YOUR FAVORITE SONG WAS ON THE OLDIES STATION

By: Kayla Gonzales

2015 marked the start of my Twenty One Pilots obsession at the age of twelve. It was the era of middle school me running fan accounts, befriending strangers on the internet worldwide, writing fanfics, and having to illegally download songs off of YouTube onto my iPhone 6. That chapter closed during my high school years in 2020 when I left the fandom scene. Four years later, in 2024, I returned to their music right before my senior year of college.

Lead singer Tyler Joseph and drummer Josh Dun embarked on "The Clancy World Tour" in August. A few months before the tour, I spent the summer non stop listening to "Backslide," track three of *Clancy*. I slowly started listening to each track on the album and knew I needed to finally see the band live in person.

On the day of the concert, I dressed up in an old band tee that I would constantly wear to class in middle school. When I got to the venue, I stood in awe at the crowd before me. I grew up feeling so out of place with the music I listened to, unable to share it with anyone around me. Being part of the crowd felt as if I was finally being accepted into a judgment-free environment. It was an overwhelming sense of belonging that I longed for while growing up.

Visually, the performance was incredible. The duo ensured that everyone in the audience understood everything they had been building toward all these years. They had set up backdrops that coordinated with different eras of their music, accompanied by outfit changes to match the vibes of the songs they were performing. Tyler and Josh frequently ran through the crowd and performed in multiple spots, drawing the attention of everyone to different corners of the room. For a band of only two musicians, their dynamic and trust between each other and their audience was unmatched.

One of my favorite sections of the show was the piano medley, which consisted of a combination of songs from *Vessel* and their self-titled album. Hearing those songs live threw me for a loop and brought back endless memories of my childhood when I struggled to balance friendships and familial expectations. During "Migraine," Tyler sang the lyrics, "Shadows will scream that I'm alone / But I know we've made it this far, kid." Those were words I had been waiting years to hear live. Being able to shout them back in a crowd of like-minded individuals genuinely healed something within me and provided closure for an era I didn't know was lost.



Another special surprise for me was that Tyler played the song “Forest” in the medley (and I had no clue it was even on the setlist). A memorable part of my fandom life revolved around that song. I did not expect to hear it live, especially since it’s not available on streaming services. Veteran Twenty One Pilots fans remember the passionate discourse surrounding a fanfic titled “The Forest Fic.” It was a fan-made piece of literature with dark themes that I hardly remember anymore, but it sparked a part of my passion for fiction writing. My internet friend and I spent countless hours exchanging story ideas until we wrote a spin-off of the original fanfic and uploaded it to Wattpad. It was an unparalleled era to be growing up on the internet, and although it was slightly mentally damaging, it shaped who I am today.

Initially, the song “Next Semester” was not one of my favorites when listening to the album. However, the experience of hearing it live changed the meaning entirely for me. It gave me a moment to reflect on my own educational experiences and realize that the sleepless nights of studying and the anxious feelings of waiting for my grades to come out were almost over. It was as if the long and enduring battle was finally ending through the lyrics: “Can’t change what you’ve done / Start fresh next semester.” The feelings of relief and release washed over me as I suddenly became aware that everything that the younger me fought so hard for was finally coming to light.

The song off *Clancy* that was the nail in the coffin for a life-changing experience was “Oldies Station.” Tyler announced that he wrote this song for the fans, a moment that signified how we grew alongside him. He was fighting his own battles and chose to keep living, knowing that one day he would be older and that his mental health struggles wouldn’t seem as daunting anymore. The bridge of this song embodies this through the lyrics: “You don’t quite mind how long red lights are takin’ / Push on through / Your favorite song was on the oldies station / Push on through / You have it down, that old fight for survival / Push on through / You’re in the crowd at her first dance recital / Push on through.” It’s an anthem emphasizing that as you grow and enter the next stages in your life, everything you have been through will be worth it. You come out of the other side a stronger person for convincing yourself to keep trying, even when life seems to be shrouded in darkness. Countless moments at the concert made me realize I had finally made it, and my 6th-grade self would never have fathomed the things I got to do, the people I got to meet, and the life I was able to live because of her.





Photo by Katherine Costa



Photo by Sahana Iyer

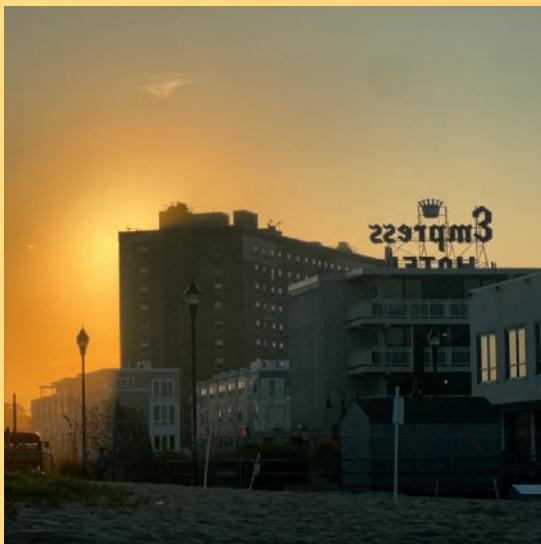


Photo by Akansha Singh



Photo by Akansha Singh



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Photo by Ally Garcia



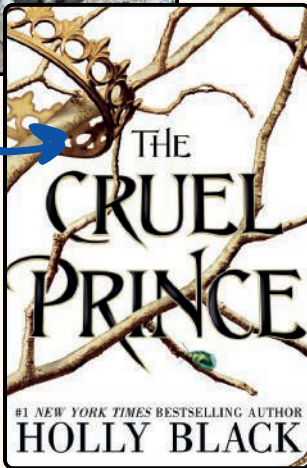
Photo by Ally Garcia



Photo by Katherine Costa

am I thinking too much into this?

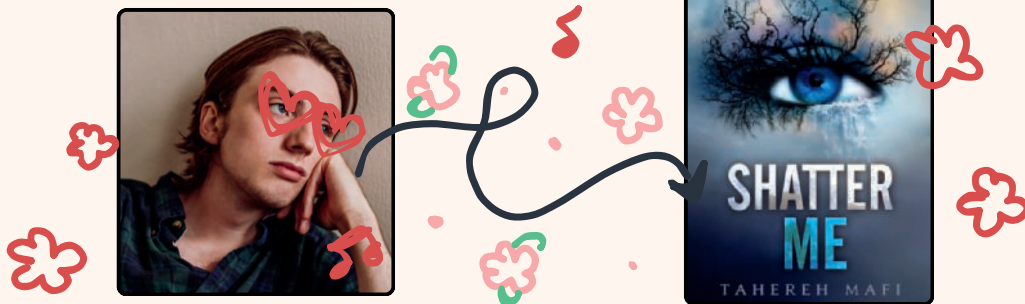
By Ella Easton



Picture this: it's 7 AM. You're fifteen minutes into your 45-minute commute to school, hopelessly bored and considering getting into a fit of road rage with that poor old lady in the Honda Civic next to you—*anything* to stay alert. You decide to shuffle-play your liked songs on Spotify (because who doesn't like the surprise of hearing the song you fixated on during your 7th-grade depressive phase?) and "Blue" by Billie Eilish graces your dashboard. Now, you didn't ask for that diabolically iconic verse to be beautifully sung throughout the surround sound of your 2019 Jeep Cherokee, but nevertheless, Ms. Eilish's angelic voice croons, "You were born reaching for your mother's hands / Victim of your father's plans to rule the world." Your thoughts have no choice but to wander to Prince Carden Greenbriar of Holly Black's iconic *The Folk of the Air* series, because he was born reaching for his mother's hands, desperate for anyone to love him unconditionally—like a mother should. He, and the rest of his family, *did* fall victim to his father's (and brother's) all-consuming need for the Elfhame throne.

This experience led me to think of all of the other beautiful worlds I have immersed myself in throughout my reading journey, and how quickly I was thrown back into that wonderful experience with just a line of a song. In the following sections, I will share some of my favorite songs as well as the books they remind me of in an attempt to explore how music is just as powerful of a storytelling device as works of literature.

"Happy Life" by Roland Faunte = Shatter Me by Tahereh Mafi



The first time I listened to "Happy Life," I knew I was obsessed. This song has been on repeat in Eevee—my car—regardless of the numerous complaints from various unhappy passenger princesses. This addiction was only made worse when, again, I let my creativity get the best of me, and I started imagining the song from the point of view of Aaron Warner: a main character in the YA dystopian *Shatter Me* series. I could write an entire dissertation on the correlations this amazing song has to the inner monologue of that amazing, fictional man, however, due to word counts (BOOO) I can only get into a few of my thoughts. For starters, if Faunte's heart-stuttering, reoccurring line "You mattered when nothing mattered / If I need something let me have her," doesn't perfectly explain Aaron's obsession with the female main character,

Juliette, I don't know what would. On top of that, one of Faunte's final stanzas is such an accurate description of Aaron's internal struggles throughout the novel: "now you can picture this broken boy, with dreams of things he can't enjoy, speaking words he won't fulfill, and promising that it can happen, but with all the years I have on my name, living in a Grecian cave, where nothing of a concrete world allows me now to love a girl." Now, if you happen to stumble upon me crying happy/sad tears while driving around in Evey in the near future, know it is because I am listening to Faunte's poetic discography while cursing Tahereh Mafi for making the lives of her characters so tragic.

"Keep That to Yourself" by Tristan =
Love and Other Words by Christina Lauren



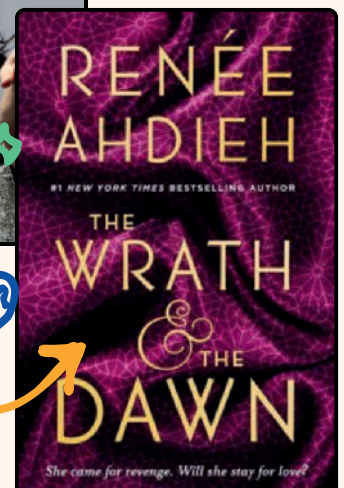
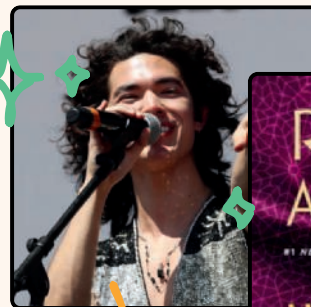
I audibly gasped when I heard this song for the first time. I'd bet my life savings—my bookshelf—that Christina Hobbs and Lauren Billings' NYT bestselling novel, *Love and Other Words*, was Tristan's inspiration for her song, "Keep That to Yourself." There is not a single other explanation for how perfectly her chorus matches up with the plot of *Love and Other Words*.

Tristan's use of the lyrics, "I think part of me is destined to love you forever / So we can't do this all again to not end up together / Please don't look at me that way when I'm here with someone else / I don't think I love him / I'm scared you can tell," physically hurts me every time I hear them.

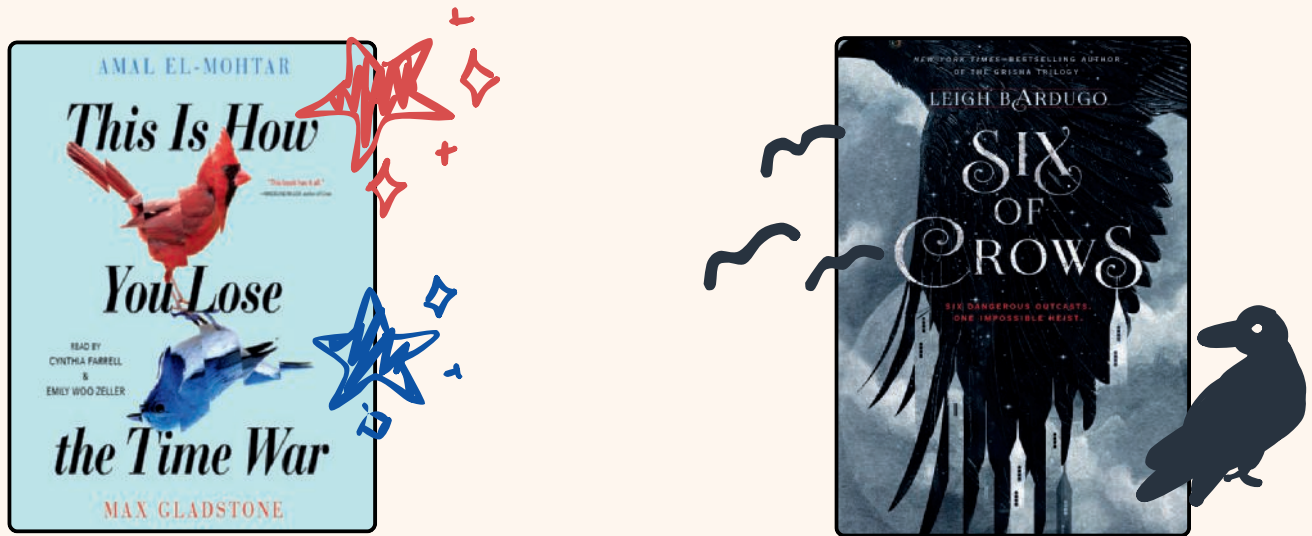
If you've read this beautiful and painful romance novel, I beg of you to listen to this song with this correlation in mind. If you have not read this book yet, good luck!

"The Cut That Always Bleeds" by Conan Gray =
The Wrath and the Dawn by Renée Ahdieh

If you know me, you know that the line "You honestly expect me to breathe in a world without air?" from Renée Ahdieh's novel, *The Wrath and the Dawn*, is permanently engraved into the ridges of my brain. I do not wish to spoil any plot points for anyone, but if you have read this scene while kicking your legs like a schoolgirl—as I did—you will know Conan's lyrics: "But even though you're killing me / I need you like the air I breathe / I need, I need you more than me / I need you more than anything / Please, please," perfectly encapsulates this moment shared between Shazi and Khalid, our two main characters. If you have not encountered this experience, do so immediately for the sake of your own happiness. While this one line hits extremely hard, the whole song truly embodies the essence of the main conflict regarding the romance plot in this book.



Now there are many honorable mentions I could discuss, such as Hozier’s lyrics, “No grave can hold my body down / I’ll crawl home to her,” in “Work Song” being eerily similar to Leigh Bardugo’s “I would come for you. And if I couldn’t walk, I’d crawl to you,” in *Six of Crows*. Or, Conan Gray’s, “You’re pointing at stars in the sky that already died / Stop trying to keep us alive / You can’t force the stars to align when they’ve already died,” in “Astronomy” and how it makes my heart feel heavy with memories of Blue and Red from *This Is How You Lose the Time War* by Amal El-Mohtar and Max Gladstone. And don’t even get me started on the timeless, “And I’d give up forever to touch you” in the Goo Goo Doll’s hit single, “Iris”, and how I hear it playing in my brain everytime I think of Tricia Levenseller’s novel, *The Shadows Between Us*.



These endless examples are proof that songs have the same power of storytelling and ability to evoke strong emotional reactions as 200+ paged novels do. The ability to experience so many complex emotions through the simple process of reading a novel or listening to the lyrics of a relatively short song is truly an amazing gift.

Or, maybe tomorrow I should listen to a podcast on my monotonous morning commute instead of tempting fate with the press of a green shuffle-play button.

Maybe I’m just thinking too much into this.



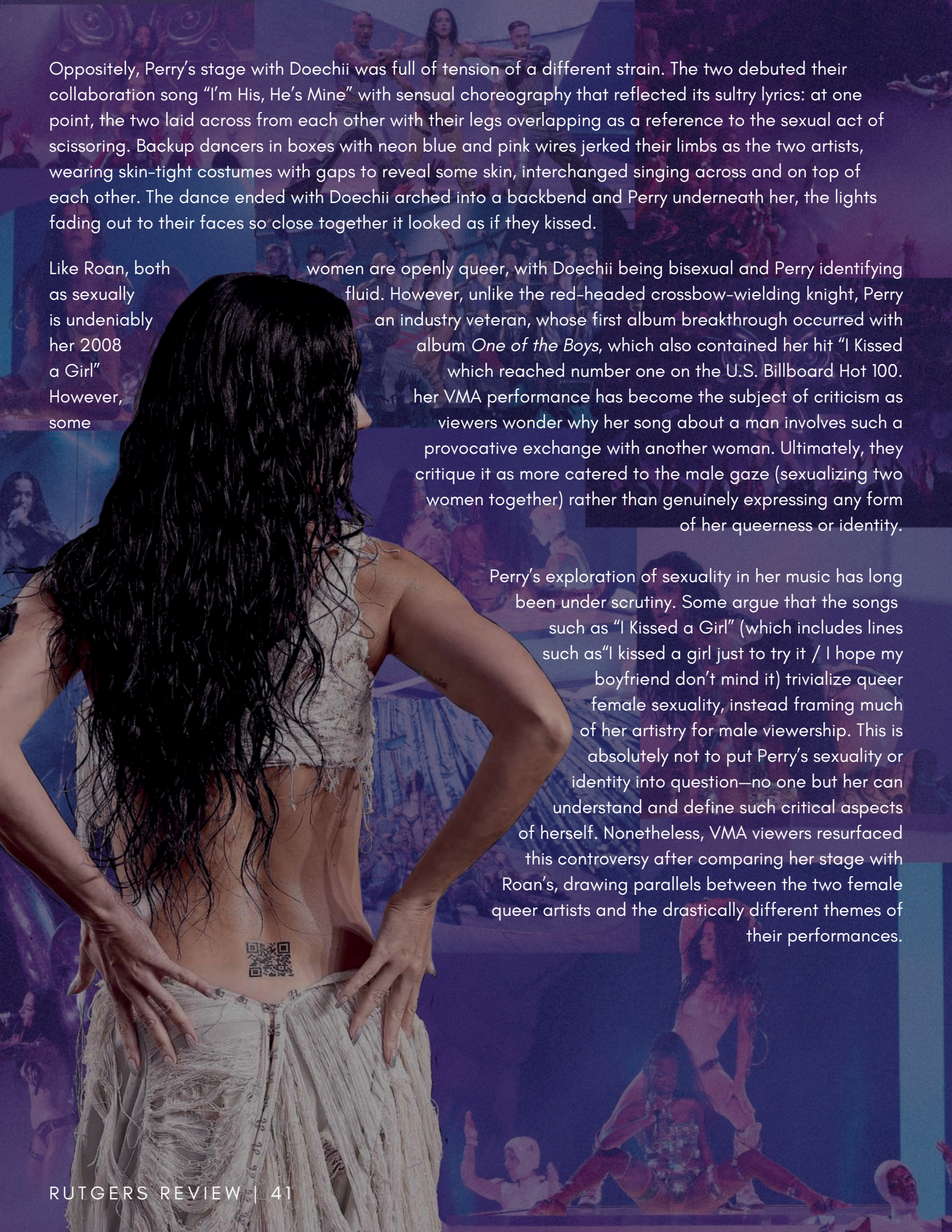
THE VMAS: CHAPPELL ROAN AND KATY PERRY

By: Karis Kim

The 2024 MTV Video Music Awards had two of today's top pop princesses belting their hearts out in flashy and (quite literally) fiery performances. Chappell Roan and Katy Perry, a seemingly overnight internet sensation compared to a decade-long record bestseller, are nonetheless united in at least one fundamental aspect: their queerness. However, Roan's passionate rendition of her hit song "Good Luck, Babe" and Perry's sensual release of "I'm His, He's Mine" has viewers drawing parallels between how they express their identities and how the male gaze factors into it.

At the VMAs, Roan's recent successes continued as she gratefully accepted the award for *Best New Artist*. Her meteoric rise to fame began with her 2023 album *The Rise and Fall of a Midwest Princess*; seven months later, her single "Good Luck, Babe" instantly took over the radios, and her Spotify followers ballooned from around 1m followers to over 46m within a year. Aside from her characteristic curly red hair and drag-inspired costumes, she's also widely known as being a lesbian, made evident through numerous statements and lyrics. "Good Luck, Babe" has a verse dedicated to a nameless woman Roan describes as solely an anguished extension of her husband, whose decisions have led her to briefly think about Roan and what she could've avoided.

Her performance of "Good Luck, Babe" can be summarized with one word: medieval. She emerged from smoky gates wielding a burning crossbow; against the backdrop of a looming castle, her silver armor costume shone in time with the pillars of fire behind her. Her backup dancers supported her literally and metaphorically: men donning armor and swords followed a choreography that alternated between unified marching and dramatic battling against one another as Roan sang amidst the chaos. When she reached the song's section about the forlorn woman, she gracefully fell to her knees as her voice sank to a whisper. As the tension heightened, she eventually rose and raised her sword in the air before belting out a defiant "I told you so," vocally embodying the emotional turmoil the fictitious situation brought her.



Oppositely, Perry's stage with Doechii was full of tension of a different strain. The two debuted their collaboration song "I'm His, He's Mine" with sensual choreography that reflected its sultry lyrics: at one point, the two laid across from each other with their legs overlapping as a reference to the sexual act of scissoring. Backup dancers in boxes with neon blue and pink wires jerked their limbs as the two artists, wearing skin-tight costumes with gaps to reveal some skin, interchanged singing across and on top of each other. The dance ended with Doechii arched into a backbend and Perry underneath her, the lights fading out to their faces so close together it looked as if they kissed.

Like Roan, both as sexually is undeniably her 2008 a Girl" However, some

women are openly queer, with Doechii being bisexual and Perry identifying fluid. However, unlike the red-headed crossbow-wielding knight, Perry an industry veteran, whose first album breakthrough occurred with album *One of the Boys*, which also contained her hit "I Kissed a Girl" which reached number one on the U.S. Billboard Hot 100. her VMA performance has become the subject of criticism as viewers wonder why her song about a man involves such a provocative exchange with another woman. Ultimately, they critique it as more catered to the male gaze (sexualizing two women together) rather than genuinely expressing any form of her queerness or identity.

Perry's exploration of sexuality in her music has long been under scrutiny. Some argue that the songs such as "I Kissed a Girl" (which includes lines such as "I kissed a girl just to try it / I hope my boyfriend don't mind it) trivialize queer female sexuality, instead framing much of her artistry for male viewership. This is absolutely not to put Perry's sexuality or identity into question—no one but her can understand and define such critical aspects of herself. Nonetheless, VMA viewers resurfaced this controversy after comparing her stage with Roan's, drawing parallels between the two female queer artists and the drastically different themes of their performances.



Photo by Akansha Singh



Photo by Ally Garcia



Art by Julia Burgess



Photo by Akansha Singh

CONCERT REVIEW


SEC I ROW C SEAT 14

RR


KAYLA
GONZALES

SEC I ROW C SEAT 19

Having experienced 17 concerts from January to September, 2024 has become my biggest year yet for live music. I saw some of my favorite small artists, such as Katherine Li and Sadie Jean, and witnessed history in the making at sold-out Madison Square Garden shows for Olivia Rodrigo, Niall Horan, Tate McRae, and Conan Gray. There were so many incredible moments, but a handful of artists stood out in terms of vocals, stage presence, audience engagement, and overall experience.

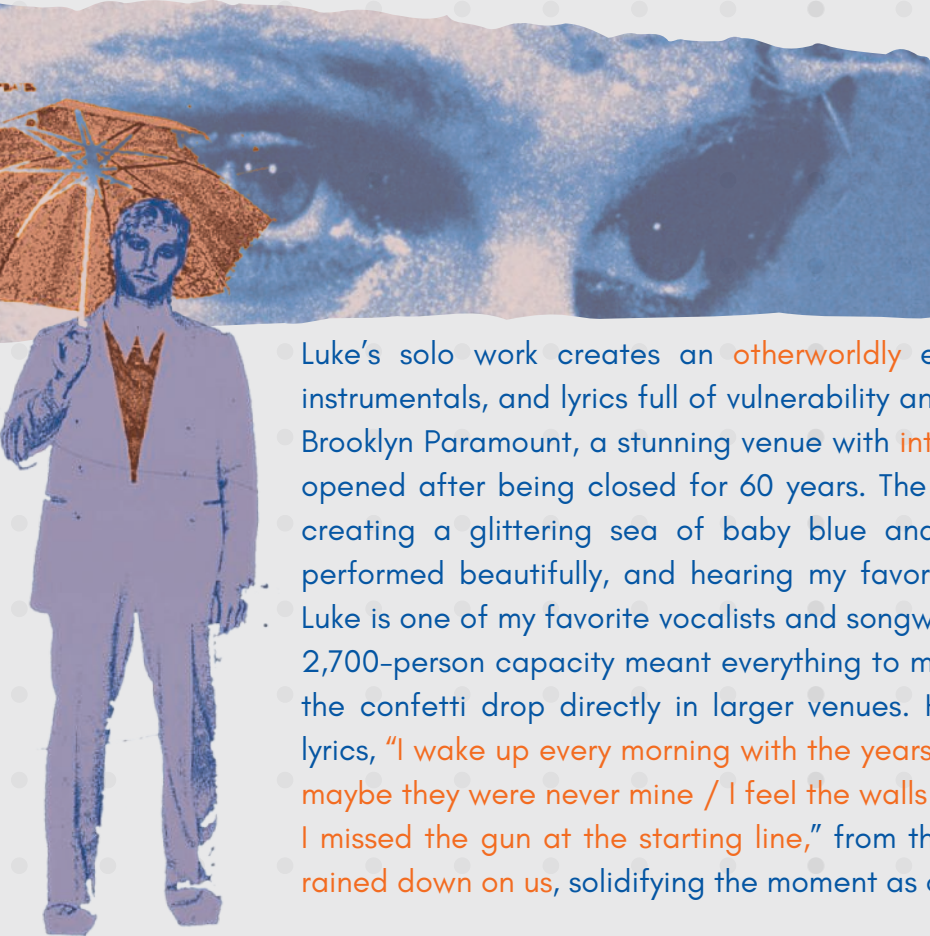


Beating the Ticketmaster war to snag four **Olivia Rodrigo** tickets might have been one of my favorite wins, especially after losing out on tickets to the *Sour Tour*. Olivia put on an amazing performance where screaming the lyrics felt like a cathartic release. Everyone around me was decked in their cutest Olivia-themed outfits with dashes of purple and remnants of stars and butterflies sprinkled throughout. During "**Teenage Dream**," Olivia played the piano keys while home videos of her childhood were projected as a montage. It was so emotional because you could feel how proud people were in the room. We watched Olivia sing songs she wrote in her bedroom to a sold-out crowd every night.



Another one of my favorite moments was when Olivia sat on a **glowing moon** and flew all over the crowd singing "**Logical**" and "**Enough For You**." Those songs went platinum in my car based on the number of times I've played them, and I got to witness it all with one of my best friends. **The GUTS World Tour** was one of the most sought-after performances of the year and such a great concert to witness live.





Luke Hemmings, lead singer of 5 Seconds of Summer (5SOS), went on his first-ever solo tour, *Nostalgia For A Time That Never Existed*.

Luke's solo work creates an **otherworldly** experience for me through vivid imagery, instrumentals, and lyrics full of vulnerability and self-discovery. It was my first show at the Brooklyn Paramount, a stunning venue with **intricately designed** ceilings that had recently opened after being closed for 60 years. The crowd seemingly coordinated their outfits, creating a glittering sea of baby blue and white across the floor. Every song was performed beautifully, and hearing my favorite songs on the setlist was life-changing. Luke is one of my favorite vocalists and songwriters, so being so close in the crowd with a 2,700-person capacity meant everything to me. I have never been close enough to enjoy the confetti drop directly in larger venues. However, to my surprise, as Luke sang the lyrics, "I wake up every morning with the years ticking by / I'm missing all these memories, maybe they were never mine / I feel the walls are closin' / I'm running out of time / I think I missed the gun at the starting line," from the final song, "Starting Line," white **confetti rained down on us**, solidifying the moment as one of my favorite concert memories ever.

Ohio duo **Twenty One Pilots (TØP)** round off my top three favorite performances of the year. It was my first time seeing the band live after listening to them for almost a decade. Lead singer Tyler Joseph and drummer Josh Dun put on a **mind-blowing performance**. At one point, Tyler was singing "Car Radio" on the stage, and then all of a sudden, he was standing in the 200s. Their crowd control was incredible and **unlike anything I had seen before**. The visuals created an immersive world-building experience that transported me to the middle school years of constantly wearing band merch, discussing TØP lore, and repeatedly playing their music. **Screaming my heart out** to every song healed my inner emo kid. During "Next Semester," chanting the lyrics "Can't change what you've done / Start fresh next semester" released a wave of wistful **nostalgia** for me. Within that moment, it finally hit that I am actually graduating college next semester, almost ending the academic journey I've been on my entire life. I'm getting to live a life that the younger me only dreamed of and continuing to grow up with the music I loved back then.



Being able to see a lot of artists I love this year was **truly special**. Of all the performances, Twenty One Pilots is **a definite must-see** act and officially holds the title of **the best concert I have ever attended**. With countless artists still on my concert wishlist, I look forward to more core memories in the future and continuing to grow alongside the **music** that has shaped me.



TECHNICOLOR

Photo by Kelly Tang



RED, BLUE, AND GREEN ALL OVER:

What Technicolor Teaches Us About Living

BY: NIKHITA KUMAR

Technicolor: the vibrant color process used in old motion pictures. Red, green, and blue film strips were used to create the brilliant, saturated colors we see in classic films such as *The Wizard of Oz*. That is where most people's knowledge of this venerable film coloring process ends. Yet the history of technicolor is deeper than most are inclined to believe. Its rise in the film industry was colored by the bloodshed of World War II. Technicolor faced its own battles, challenged by simpler coloring processes such as Cinecolor. While technicolor was once a widely-used film coloring process, one might wonder what relevance it has to our modern lives. Perhaps the tumultuous history of technicolor has something more to offer us outside of a lesson on old film techniques.

For many living during World War II, technicolor was the colorful means of their escapism. People distracted themselves from the grim war with colorful, pigmented cinema (such as the aforementioned *Wizard of Oz*) filled with joyful people dancing and singing. Just as technicolor was a means to keep people distracted from the suffering all around them, it was used to justify the massacre as well. Major film companies released dozens of war propaganda films, and while most were produced in black-and-white, many were produced in technicolor. The brightly colored shots of blasting cannons and soaring fighter jets fueled the patriotism of audiences. Technicolor films may have given people some much-needed respite, but it's undeniable that they were used to manipulate the public. Their bright colors cloaked the darkness of war, allowing people to forget their woes. In the end, whether it was used for escapism or propaganda, technicolor was just a tool for the greater needs of the war.

Technicolor faced its own challenges in its usage by film companies. Many preferred to produce films in black and white, or use Cinecolor, another film coloring technique during the 1930s. Unlike the relatively complex technicolor coloring process, which required red, green, and blue strips, Cinecolor utilized just two colors: red and blue-green. This cheap, simple process rose in popularity among film groups. Cinecolor had key limitations compared to technicolor: because it only utilized two colors to portray the vast spectrum of color in film, films in Cinecolor were often duller than their technicolor counterparts. Yet to the companies filming these movies, this was a practical, even necessary sacrifice. Depending on the tone of the film, the usage of a less vibrant color palette could be a calculated choice, used to evoke a more serious tone. The use of technicolor was thus determined by the needs of film companies: whether they had the means to use the complex technicolor process, or if they felt it suited the needs of their films.



THE WIZARD OF OZ, MOVIE POSTER

In short, technicolor was not just a bright medium for film, but a tool for the greater purposes of history. Yet there is something *human* in its manipulative escapism, in its struggle to remain on top. Our lives, whether we like it or not, are often determined by the needs of things larger than ourselves. If we are mere puppets on strings, then maybe there is no point to living beyond the bare minimum. Why choose the freedom and flexibility of color when our lives will remain constricted, no matter what? One day, we will simply be a brief history lesson. Yet we live on. And even as technicolor was used and cast aside, it lived on and made its mark in history. If the traditional meaning of living the technicolor way is to embrace a vivid, more fulfilling life, then perhaps its complex history only further shows the importance of living passionately despite our confined lives.

OUR LIVES,
WHETHER WE LIKE IT
OR NOT, ARE
OFTEN DETERMINED
BY THE NEEDS OF
THINGS LARGER
THAN OURSELVES.

BY SOPHIE
D'ERRICO

technicolor IN FILM

We all know the scene: Dorothy steps out of her tornado-wrecked, sepia-tinted farmhouse into the vibrant world of technicolor that is Oz and its yellow-brick road.

Although not the first film to use technicolor, *The Wizard of Oz* certainly holds the title for the most iconic use of it. The brilliant yellow road, the emerald green castle, the glorious (albeit plastic-looking) flora, and, of course, the dazzling ruby red slippers were an awe to their original audience back in 1939- and continue to enchant audiences today.

The process of technicolor involved splitting the film strip into red, green, and blue sections. From there, the three strips are developed and printed separately. They are then put through dyes that correspond to their complementary colors (cyan for red, magenta for green, and yellow for blue). Once the prints are dyed and dried, they are laminated together, including a black and white layer to increase contrast. When combined, each layer of the print formed a bold, striking palette that breathed life into films.

By the 1950s, the technicolor process was replaced with cheaper ways of obtaining color, and by the 1970s, it was considered obsolete. While we can mourn the original process, we can better use our efforts into appreciating how modern films use color in powerful ways.

Certain films immediately elicit the thought of specific colors. *The Matrix's* technological and mysterious green tint, *Twilight's* dark and moody blue, and the brown wash of *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*. Most recently, the opposing color palettes of *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer* were put on display showcasing the equal value of bright, pastels as well as dark, ominous tones in world-building for films.





Color is truly the lifeblood of film. Though an often undervalued part of the film-making process, color conveys emotion, represents characters and their arcs, and symbolizes themes or motifs. Colors frequently have overarching meanings- red is associated with love, passion, anger, or power, and blue is associated with cold, isolation, or calmness. However, these common uses are not a rulebook and many filmmakers like to deviate from them. Wes Anderson for example, is notorious for using bright, pastel colors in emotionally difficult scenes. The contrast enhances the irony and tension of the moment.

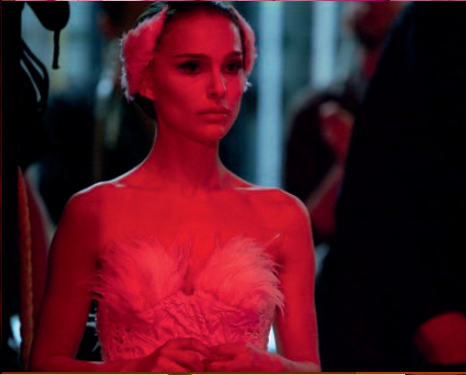
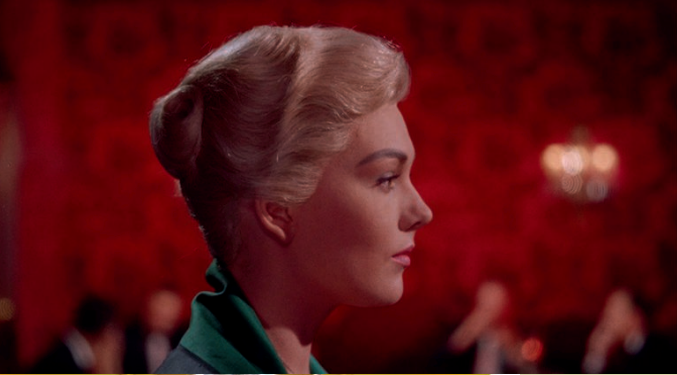
Color is also frequently associated with characters in film. A notable example is that the titular character in *Barbie* is represented by her signature color, pink. However, color can also communicate changes in a character as the film progresses and a viewer who pays close attention to a film can decipher themes and plot points before they are revealed.



For instance, the central character Nina in Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan* begins the film by wearing soft colors such as beige and pink to represent her innocence. As she descends into madness and is overtaken by the Black Swan, she begins to wear black. Similarly, Anakin Skywalker's shift to the villainous Darth Vader in George Lucas' *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith* is foreshadowed as the colors around the character shift from neutral tones to darker, powerful colors such as black and red- all leading up to the final showdown between Anakin and his mentor on a brightly red, lava-filled planet that represents the final turn of Anakin to Vader.

While color can represent so much overt and covert information in a film, it is also simply engaging and visually entertaining to watch a film that values color. Films that have embraced color have become timeless and left lasting impressions on audiences. Here are some of my favorite examples of color in film:





COLOR

A (Select) History
by Karis kim

Technicolor allowed for the production of color in motion pictures, revolutionizing cinema as we know it today. But for all its novelty, technicolor is merely a footnote in the extensive chronicles of color in human history. Here are five pigments that have sparked revolutions of their own:

CARMINE

As early as 700 BC, American civilizations crushed female cochineal insects to extract the carmine they contain; the Aztecs, for instance, used it to dye their textiles. Over two millennia later, carmine's use exploded in scale during the Spanish colonization of the Americas. During the 16th and 17th centuries, carmine became a major source of income for the Spanish Crown as the third greatest import out of the "New World", surpassed only by gold and silver. European artists—including giants such as Raphael, Rembrandt, and Rubens—eagerly took advantage of this deep red pigment as a glaze, layering it upon other reds to increase its intensity. Although the Spanish Crown had a monopoly on cochineal, after the 1820s, the French, Germans, and British eventually created their own alternatives, lowering the price of carmine and increasing its accessibility. Today, carmine is widely used in cosmetics, medications, and as food dye.



PORTRAIT OF A CARDINAL (1510-1511)
RAPHAEL



THE VIRGIN IN PRAYER (1640-1650)
GIOVANNI BATTISTA SALVI DA
SASSOFERRATO

ULTRAMARINE BLUE

Ultramarine blue was created from ground lapis lazuli, a semi-precious deep blue stone used from the 3rd millennium BC until today. Until the late 18th century, the only source of lapis lazuli in Europe, Asia, and Africa was the remote Sar-e-Sang valley in the Badakhshan mountains in Afghanistan, where it had been mined for over six millennia. Ancient Egyptians and Babylonians used the stone for jewelry and amulets, and the stone was believed to possess magical properties; as such, lapis lazuli was used as a defense against the evil eye for thousands of years. It made its way across Europe during the Crusades, but for hundreds of years, its rarity and cost ensured that quality lapis lazuli consistently cost around an ounce of gold. Therefore, only the richest of patrons—among whom included the Medici family—could afford to include it in commissioned artworks. From lapis lazuli, European artists often used ultramarine blue to color the clothes of the Virgin Mary.

THE STARRY NIGHT (1889)
VINCENT VAN GOGH



INDIAN YELLOW

This fluorescent, deep-mustard pigment is said to have originated in 15th-century India from the urine of mango-fed cows. Making its way to Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries (primarily popularized by Dutch painters), among the most famous of users was Van Gogh, who used Indian yellow to paint the moon in *The Starry Night*. Eventually, however, consumers were curious about the largely unknown origins and components of this popular pigment, and in 1883, an investigation was conducted; several months later, it was revealed that cattle were being exclusively fed mango leaves and water, rendering them incredibly malnourished and dehydrated. This, subsequently, made their urine an incredibly bright yellow, and this was used to make the pigment before it was shipped off to Europe. This report was published in England's *Royal Society of Arts Journal*, and the pigment mysteriously disappeared from the market, which is rumored to be because of protests against animal cruelty.



PICKING FLOWERS (1875)
PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR

SCHEELE'S GREEN

Swedish chemist Carl Wilhelm Scheele invented this arsenic-laced, bright green pigment in 1775. Cheap to produce and uncannily accurate in mimicking hues found in nature, Scheele's Green became an instant hit and was widely popular during the Victorian era. The highly toxic pigment was used in clothing (dresses, waistcoats, shoes, gloves, trousers), home decor (wallpaper, rugs, textiles), as food coloring, and in paintings, with users usually experiencing rashes, skin irritation, and/or oozing sores. French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte's bedroom wallpaper contained high amounts of Scheele's green, leading some historians to believe that this caused his death in 1821. The toxicity may have also been responsible for Cézanne's blindness and Monet's blindness, and the pigment began to fall out of fashion in the 1860s.

LEAD WHITE

From antiquity to the 19th century, lead white was the most widely produced and used white pigment in the world. The ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans prepared the pigment by putting lead shavings above vinegar in specifically designed clay pots, which allowed acidic vapors to react with the lead; afterward, they used it to prepare ointments and plasters. Around the globe, lead white was widely used by European painters (particularly for highlights and skin tones such as Vermeer's *Girl With a Pearl Earring*) and East Asian artworks (especially murals or silk paintings). The 17th-century Dutch had a unique way of creating the pigment: after layering cow and horse manure over lead and vinegar, they left the mixture in a sealed room for three months, after which the materials would combine and create flakes of pure white. Although immensely popular for several millennia, scientists identified lead as poisonous in the 19th century, and lead white slowly began to fall out of use; however, the production of lead white paint was only banned in the US in 1978.



GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING (1665)
JOHANNES VERMEER



in a **TECHNICOLOUR** beat




by Kayla Gonzales

Not much can replace the feeling of the chilly fall weather, the sound of the wind rustling through dried leaves, the warmth of a fuzzy blanket, and the illuminating glow of fairy lights in your childhood bedroom. It's accompanied by scrolling through Netflix for your next binge-watch—something, anything, to fill the void. You pause when you see the words “Scream” appear on the screen, accompanied by the iconic Ghostface mask and unfamiliar teenage faces. You have never seen the movies before, but all three seasons of *Scream: The TV Series* by MTV were about to become your latest obsession during the spooky fall season.

During season one, episode three, you hear “All We Do” by Oh Wonder for the first time. You're watching your favorite side characters being brutally murdered in a fit of unsuspecting rage; the main character is in tears, secrets are being revealed, and all you can think about is, “This is a cinematic masterpiece,” as you add the song to your sad vibes playlist.

Two episodes later, random characters are simultaneously finding romance and betraying one another, because what is fear if not the perfect reason for trauma bonding and falling in love? The unmistakable tone and style of Oh Wonder plays through the speakers again, and the song “Technicolour Beat” becomes nestled on the playlist between “All We Do” and multiple other songs this soundtrack introduced you to.



The rise and fall of the emotions surrounding Oh Wonder's music consistently sets the ambiance of the scene. The idea of a technicolor beat represents the beauty and intensity of falling in love. Something that is technicolor is often considered bright, saturated, and vivid. When listening to "Technicolour Beat," one can't help but feel the warmth and comfort of the love story unfolding. The vocals are supported by a bass guitar, piano, and light percussion. The snapping of the artist's fingers can be heard throughout the song, adding an upbeat element to the soft-spoken vocals.

Oh Wonder repeats a catchy chorus four times through the lyrics, "Jump into the heat / Spinnin' on our feet / In a technicolour beat / You and me, caught up in a dream / In a technicolour beat." The lyrics become a whirlwind of baby pinks and fiery reds as one imagines two lovers embracing each other, utterly unfazed by the world around them. The song almost feels like an escape from reality, with euphoric imagery through the words, "I feel life for the very first time / Love in my arms and the sun in my eyes / I feel safe in the 5 AM light / You carry my fears as the heavens set fire." The London duo presents their vulnerability through each passing second of the three-minute-long song.

"Technicolour Beat" demonstrates the feeling of throwing yourself completely into a relationship, falling deeper and deeper until it consumes you. It's the certainty of knowing that there are emotions burning brightly inside one's soul, becoming fully aware that the bond shared between two people is alive and well. Finding Oh Wonder's music through *Scream* ironically showed me that true love is technicolor, and people who love each other would go extreme distances to fight for it.



Photo by Akansha Singh



Photo by Ally Garcia



Photo by Ally Garcia



Photo by Ally Garcia



Photo by Ally Garcia



Reds by Jenna Sadiq



Photo by Ally Garcia



Photo by Akansha Singh



Photo by Akansha Singh



POTPOURRI

Photo by Amber Safeer

FILL YOUR

beli!

BY: SANSKRITI RAMJI

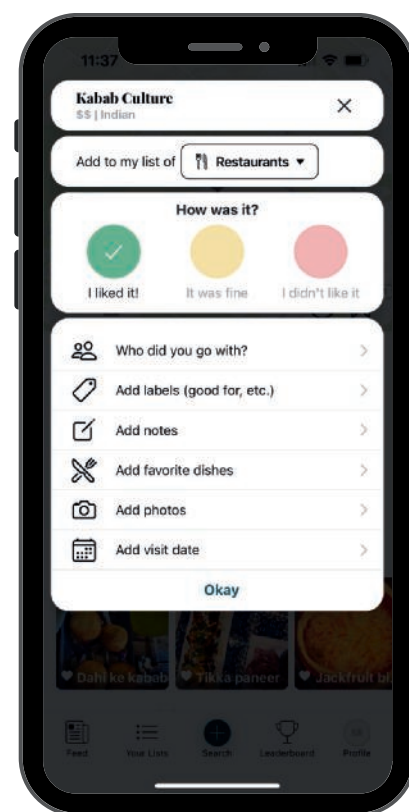
WHAT IS BELI?

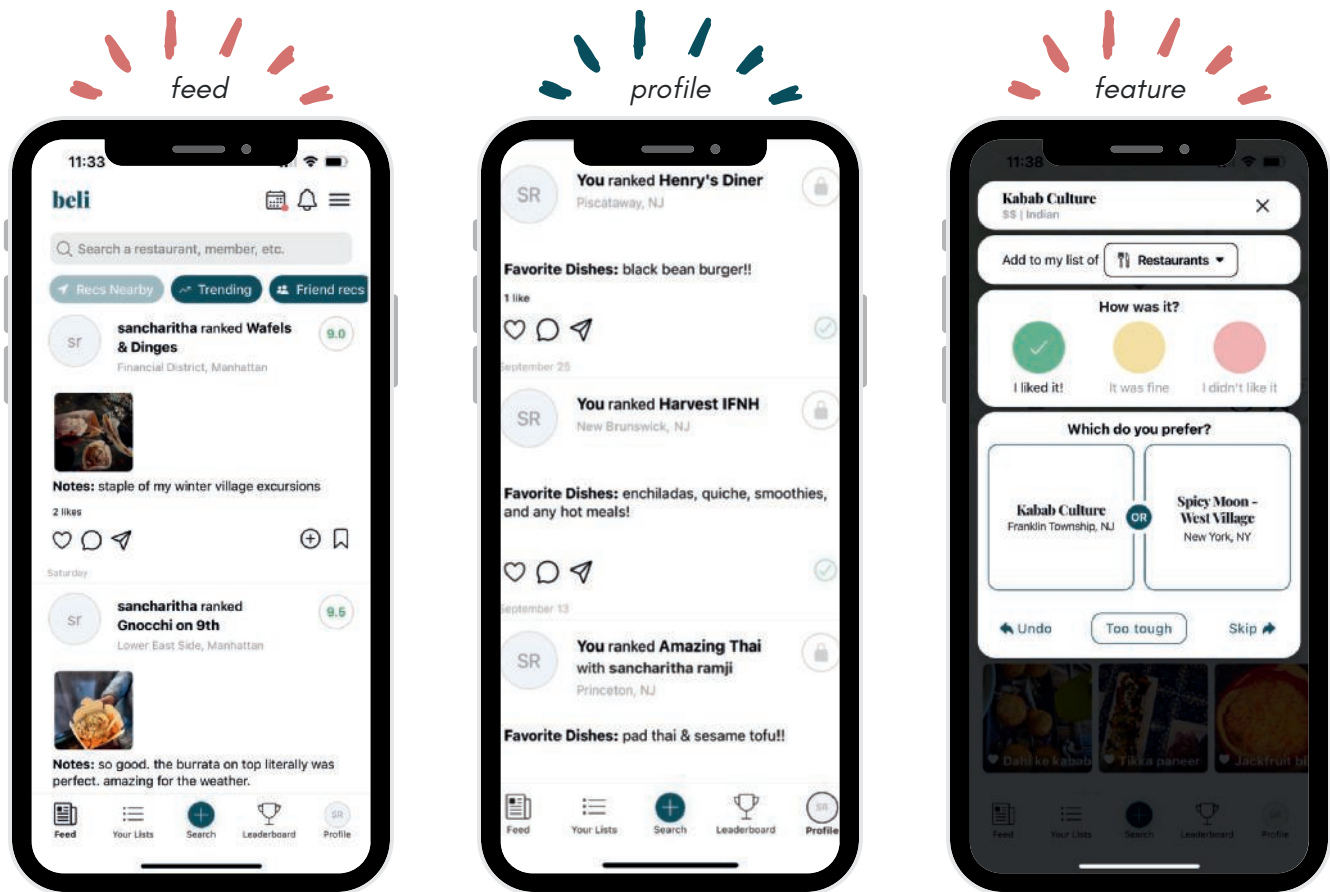
If you look at my home screen, you'll find it's pretty empty because I don't like to clutter it with apps I barely use. My sister, on the other hand, is always downloading something new. She spent the majority of this past summer trying to convince me to join one she's been using, and she finally wore me down. As much as I can't believe I'm admitting it, she was right about this one. "beli" is a social, food-reviewing app that acts as a journal for all of the eateries you visit. The app was launched in 2021 by couple Judy Thelen and Eliot Frost, who built their relationship around a shared love of visiting restaurants and found themselves searching for a more effective, curated method to find new restaurants.

THE ULTIMATE
RESTAURANT
SPREADSHEET

CREATING YOUR FIRST ENTRY:

So how does it work? There are many features and uses, so here's the lowdown: First, you can use it to review the food places you visit. Just type in a restaurant in the search bar and **select the description** that fits that place best (i.e., dessert/bakery, restaurant, bar, etc.) Then, the app will prompt you to **select a level of satisfaction** (green for great, yellow for so-so, and red for not enjoyable), and you can even give a more specific rating out of 10 if you choose. From there, **select from a list of labels** ranging from "large portions" to "good music" (and you can even submit ideas for new labels like I just did!). Then, **add the date you visited and any notes** you want to share with your friends. Finally - my personal favorite step - don't forget to **add your favorite dishes** so you or your friends know what to order for next time. A highlight for anyone whose camera eats before them will be the option to upload photos to accompany entries so that app users can see what a meal at this location might look like when they search the restaurant name. As you add friends on the app, you can tag them in the entries for restaurants that you visited together and engage in the platform's social component.





SOCIALIZING & OTHER SPECIAL FEATURES:

Your “feed” will show you all of the places that friends have visited and will allow you to like, comment, bookmark, and share their entries. The app will also keep you up-to-date with the trending places in your area so you always have new food experiences to try. beli also makes a list of the restaurants you’ve been to and allows you to make a “want to try” list, along with the “friend recs” list with places your friends have visited near you.

Eventually you can even unlock personal recommendations after enough entries. The way the curation works is that after each restaurant you visit, beli prompts you with a question regarding whether you liked it better than a previous one you visited. This way, it can track your top restaurants and constantly update recommendations based on the cuisines and experiences that were your favorites.

As someone who struggles with rating and comparing places, I love that the app still allows you the option to skip or say that it’s too tough to pick between two options and still generates useful lists for you. You can also enter as much data as you choose in creating your profile, ranging from dietary restrictions and “disliked cuisines,” and even set an annual goal to really personalize the user experience.

beli'S PROS ★

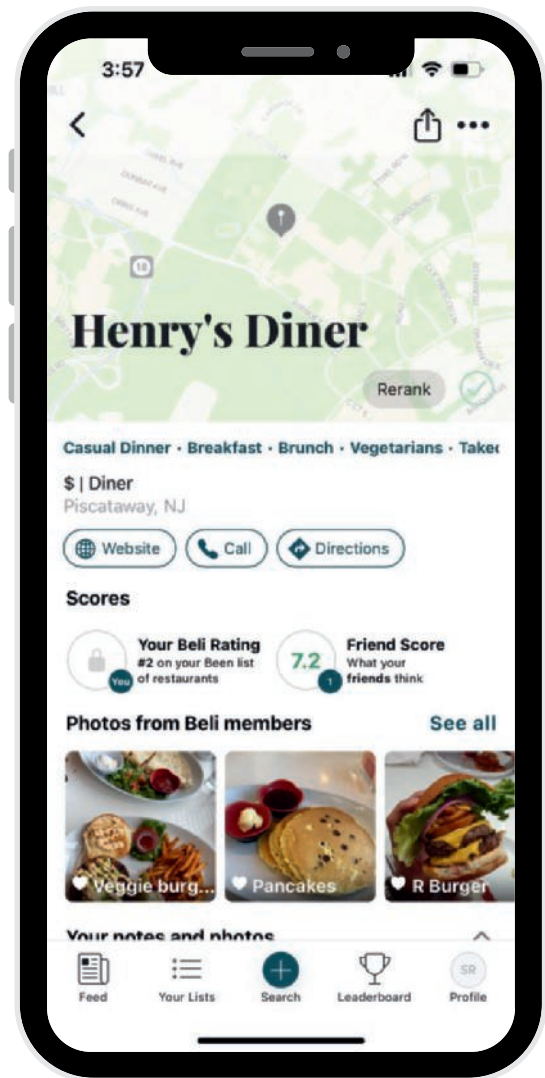
SO WHY BOTHER FIDGETING WITH ANOTHER APP WHEN YOU COULD ALWAYS JUST LOOK UP REVIEWS ONLINE?

Well, for starters, I find that food and travel bloggers use the popular online restaurant reviewing platforms, so when you want to visit a smaller, more local spot, there are fewer reviews to rely on. I've also noticed a tendency for people to make reviews only for their extremely positive – let's be honest – or unusually negative experiences. Personally, I like that beli acts more as a log and reviewing site because it ensures that the less viral spots get entries and that people are less likely to share extremely polarized reviews that can make you feel conflicted or indecisive when making a choice. It's especially credible because if you know and trust your friends' tastes, you can often go off of their entries to explore new places.

A huge bonus for us as college students is that we can add our schools to join the campus leaderboard and even review eateries at Rutgers. For instance, my profile has entries for Harvest Cafe on Cook-Douglass and Henry's Diner on Livingston. Also worth mentioning is that as a vegetarian, the app makes it easy for me to decide if a place will have enough options for me or generally match the vibes and ambiance I'm looking for in that meal. Of course, like all apps, there are features I don't use, like tracking restaurants that my friends and I have been to in a map view, which I find both overwhelming and not particularly useful.

THAT SAID, THE BEST PART OF THIS APP IS THAT YOU CAN ENGAGE WITH IT AS MUCH AS YOU WANT AND STILL REAP THE BENEFITS...

without feeling forced to give up too much of your privacy or sanity for another platform taking up your time and phone storage.



IS SNOOZING LOSING?



WE'VE ALL DONE IT -

as a grating, unforgivable, screeching noise blares into our eardrums, we lift a heavy hand and slam the button on our phone that says "snooze."

Maybe it's an outrageous hour of the morning. Maybe last night ended a little too late. Or, maybe you just decided that you just don't want to do it today. The ill-sounding alarm finally silenced, you slip back into dreamland.

I, like many others, am all too guilty of snoozing my alarm. As my "Clocks" app shows, most nights, I set three or four alarms, allowing myself the luxury of snoozing two or three times just so I can delay the unappealing rise from the comfort of my bed.

My parents are probably the most ardent critics of this habit. Spare your sleep quality; get up off the first ring and be done with it, they say to me. Why make yourself suffer by allowing yourself to fall asleep and be repeatedly shocked awake?

I am also aware of the risks that come with snoozing. There have been too many times when I have snoozed my alarm, lamenting, "just five more minutes." Five minutes turns into ten, ten into fifteen, and I wake up much later than intended, causing me to be late for my obligations.

However, recent research has shown that snoozing is not as bad as we originally thought. According to Healthline, snoozing may improve cognitive performance after waking up, does not appear to have any harmful effects on sleep quality, and does not cause us to lose that much sleep. But, snoozers still struggle with sleep inertia, or grogginess upon waking. Regardless of how people wake up, most individuals will still feel sleepy after doing so.

Although snoozing does not make the morning struggle any easier, it also does not make it any harder. I believe that whether or not to continue snoozing should be left up to personal discretion. As long as there is the expectation to get up eventually and on time, those who snooze their alarms can keep doing so without fear of "ruining" the rest of their day. Those who spring out of bed off the first alarm can also keep doing so without wondering if there is an easier alternative. As for me, I will likely keep snoozing my alarms - a gentler start to the morning is preferred over a jarring call to awakeness.

BY: ANGELINA LEI



Photo by Akansha Singh



Photo by Katherine Costa

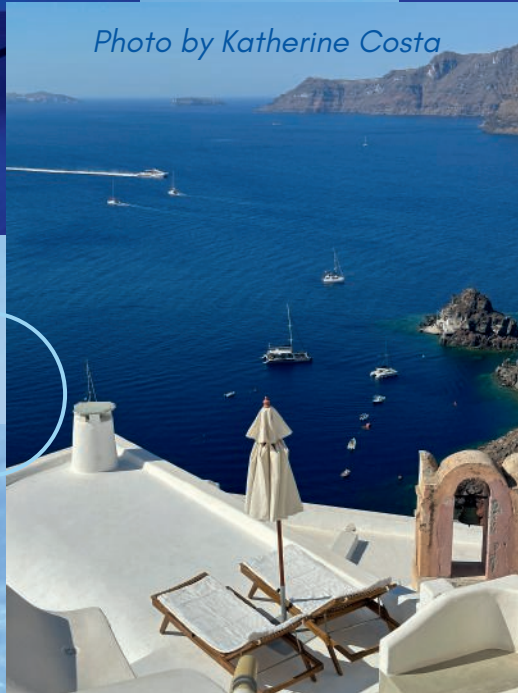


Photo by Katherine Costa



Photo by Sahana Iyer

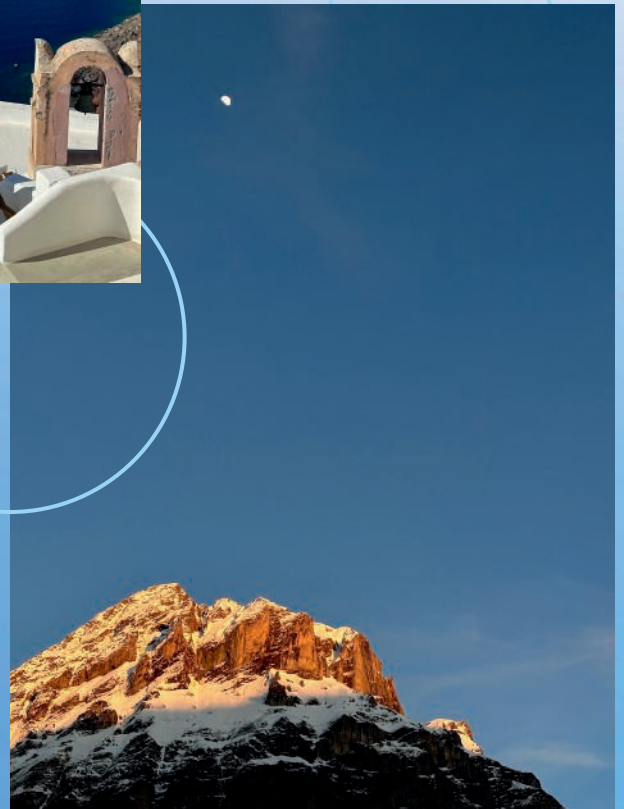


Photo by Katherine Costa

Workout Activities for Newbies

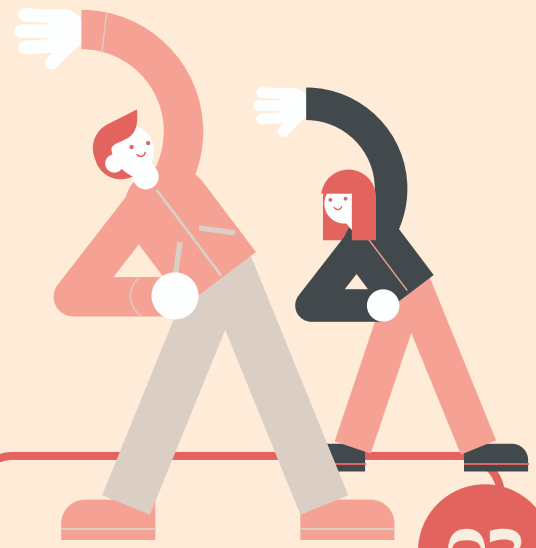
By: Sanskriti Ramji

I never played a sport in high school and wasn't a big gym rat, but I loved phys. ed and the occasional basement workout. I'm the type of person who enjoys a long walk outside in good weather, a pumped-up Just Dance session, or playing a sport for fun. So, when I got to campus this semester, I resolved to make use of the recreational facilities and potentially find new activities that work with a hectic college schedule. For starters, my idea of a good workout is thirty to forty minutes of exercise that gets me moving and lets me forget about whatever I'm stressing over that week. While ideally, I'd be able to squeeze in a workout every day, that isn't always practical, so I aim for at least three days per week. Many of my friends have told me they fall into the same bucket as me, so I thought it might be fun to try different workouts on campus and share my top 5.



01

Classes at Werblin: I tried my first spin class at Werblin, and this is my favorite workout on campus. The instructor, Stacy, was very encouraging of newbies and pushed us comfortably. I appreciated having someone watch me workout and provide advice, as well as the ability to workout with a small group of people. Even if a spin class doesn't sound like something you'd enjoy, Werblin has many classes ranging from yoga to weight lifting, and I am very excited to give them all a shot! I think this is a great way to change up the types of exercise you get in and very helpful if you're still trying to find what excites you to come to the gym. I can also see it being a fun way to make friends who can hold you accountable each week and make the experience something you look forward to. Another aspect of classes that I appreciate is the inclusion of a warm-up, cool-down, and stretching because it's really easy to accidentally strain or injure your body, and these instructors take the necessary steps that many of us often skip to ensure our workouts can actually be effective for our bodies.



02

Swimming: I grew up swimming almost every week for classes and practices, but lost touch with the habit by middle school. This is a great cardio and resistance workout for people of varying fitness levels and goals. The best part is that it comes with great health benefits without excessive wear and tear on your body. So, if you're recovering from an injury, this could be a great option. I usually go to Cook-Douglass's pool on Wednesday afternoons because most lanes are open, and they play great music. My routine consists of a few 100-meter IMs, practicing strokes in 100-meter spurts, and some kicking drills. If you're not as confident in your skills and want to learn first, I recommend looking into the recreation centers' lessons and eventually recruiting a workout partner who can join you. I definitely think it's worth the time and financial investments since this is an exercise you can continue enjoying even as you get a little older. I'll admit that the preparation and post-swim hair wash can make it hard to plan for, but I truly enjoy the pensive, calm, and accomplished feeling it gives me for the rest of my day.

03

Any Sport You Enjoy: I played badminton at Werblin with some friends recently and was surprised at how much it had me running and moving. While recreational sports are often not a very intense workout, they're a great way to get some cardio in while meeting new people and socializing. The best part is, if you're someone who struggles with thinking of the gym or working out as a chore, this could really be a solution for you! Personally, I can play pickleball for hours and have a great time doing it, so afterward, I barely notice the soreness or sweat that comes with it. I also enjoy the dynamic nature of sports and that you feel excited because you're actively trying to win and strategize – it feels like the same rules and setup can play out differently every single game! This workout will definitely be even more effective when combined with weight or resistance training and will help you train in different environments.



04

Going on walks: I know this one seems like something we're all doing anyway, but I'm talking about mindful, fast-paced walking that makes you sweat. Since I'm a freshman, I spent the beginning of this semester going on walks to explore all around campus. The best part of a brisk walk is that I get to socialize, exercise, and get some time outside, all of which get me off screens and refreshed after being stuck inside most of the day. Even if you're an upperclassman, I'm sure there's a small part of campus that you've always wanted to see or a favorite spot that you love absorbing (The Yard, Livingston's Plaza, or the trails on Cook-Douglass to name a few), and this is your chance! Best of all, this is a light, accessible exercise you can do after a meal, between classes, or under a time crunch. If you have the time to take a fast walk and do some resistance exercises, you'll definitely be able to get in an effective workout for the day!

Gym: To be honest, as a beginner, I can't say that I've totally figured this one out yet. I tend to gravitate towards the bikes and cardio machines because they feel most comfortable, though I definitely want to branch out to weighted exercises soon. For now, I've been learning how to use the Stairmaster in the gym, and it's been an effective workout that helps me expend my energy and strengthen my legs. My biggest issue is that while I love its convenience, the gym lacks the fun and entertaining elements that I look for in workouts. I'm sure some of my boredom will be overcome by challenging myself to try various exercises, but the confined space with repetitive motions is still a slight downside for me. If you're looking to start going to the gym, here are some helpful reminders from what I've learned these past few weeks: make sure to wipe down machines when you finish using them, pay attention when walking near people using the weight machines, and don't hesitate to ask people for help! **If finding friends to go with you is tough, but you're looking for a community, consider joining one of the campus workout groups or clubs!*

05

My biggest takeaway from trying out different workouts is that finding time in a busy schedule can be challenging, but it is also very rewarding. Regardless of the form of exercise, I always came back to my dorm feeling centered and more focused when completing assignments and tasks. I'm glad I could take all of you on the beginning of my fitness journey, and as much as I'm looking forward to finding more activities on campus, I hope I'll also see some of you in the recreation centers with me!



Photo by Sahana Iyer



Photo by Katherine Costa



Photo by Akansha Singh



Photo by Akansha Singh

SUPERSTITIOUS

SAADHIKA MAMIDI

"A belief or practice resulting from ignorance, fear of the unknown, trust in magic or chance, or a false conception of causation," Webster dictionary supposedly says. Those who hold superstitious beliefs often suggest that they have special knowledge or a stronger conviction to justify these beliefs for their own personal reasons.

My roommates say good luck to me before I go and take an exam, but I am not allowed to say thank you. It's bad luck.

Why? I don't know. But you can't say thank you, and if you do, you'll fail the test, at least I think so.

Superstitions give us a feeling of control and comfort, especially when dealing with things that we can't control. Uncertainty is just a part of life – we can't always predict what's coming next.

My mom doesn't let me cut my nails or my hair on Sundays. It's bad luck.

Maybe my hair will fall out, I don't know though.

Superstitions are passed down through generations, my mom basically force fed them to me, and now I follow them.

My dad hates it when I take money with my left hand. It's bad luck.

I don't know why. Perhaps I will just go broke in the near future.

But how can you live a life where you do something intentionally to try and prevent something from happening? Doesn't everything happen for a reason? Can you truly change the trajectory of the universe, of where you will end up in ten years from now?

Knock on wood when you accidentally say something you don't want happening. If you don't, that thing is going to happen, and you might end up back with your ex.

Superstitions serve as a psychological coping mechanism, offering reassurance when life's outcomes are unpredictable. In the end, superstitions are not grounded in fact but in the human desire to find solace when nothing else seems to help.

I SAY ALL THIS, BUT I
FOLLOW EVERY SINGLE ONE. I
DON'T KNOW WHY, IT'S JUST
A HABIT NOW I SUPPOSE.

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